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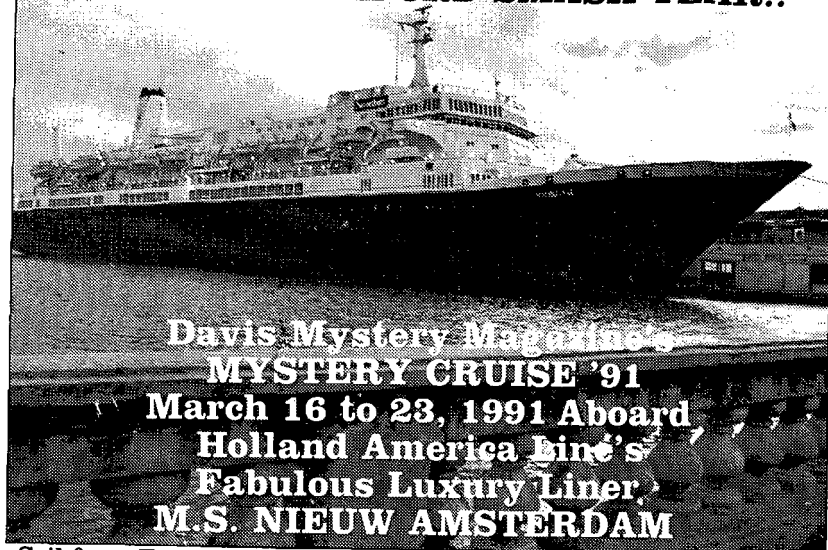
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# EDITOR'S NOTES

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# Miss Bradford and the Little Menisters

by —  
Neil  
Jillett

**I**t was such a surprise seeing Miss Bradford after all those years that at first I was not sure it was she. For a few minutes I thought I had made a mistake. And then she took the petit-point cigarette case from her handbag.

The case was scruffy with

age, and embroidered in gold thread with a *J*. I remembered, just as I remembered where I had first seen the case itself, that "J" was the initial of her first name, though I had forgotten the name, if I ever knew it.

Miss Bradford had put a book

on the bench beside her. It was bound with maroon leather, and any title was hidden by her gloves, which she had removed and placed on the book. She seemed to have no intention of reading. She just sat there, occasionally blowing a smoke ring and watching it dissolve in the pale sunshine.

I was in Melbourne for a few days, down from Sydney on business that I had completed that morning. After lunch I walked through a park towards my hotel. The midwinter day was brisk without being chilly, and I prolonged my enjoyment of the fresh air by sitting among the trees.

I had been there for a few minutes when Miss Bradford came around a corner of the path. She was using a walking stick, without appearing to be dependent on it. She wore a fur coat, long and so lustrously dark that it was almost black, and a matching hat. This tall, imperious figure was like an ancient Russian princess suddenly appearing from nowhere to claim the throne of the tsars.

There were empty seats close by, but they were in the shade. She gave me a nod, a request for permission to share my place in the sun. I smiled back. As she sat down, a thought struck me: It's she! Immediately followed by another: But surely it can't be. Then she took out the

cigarette case, and I was certain.

After a few sidelong glances at her, I asked, "Miss Bradford? It is Miss Bradford, isn't it?"

She looked at me, then looked away. Perhaps she was deaf. I repeated the question, slightly louder.

She turned to me again. "I heard you the first time." Her look intensified into a stare, as if she was trying to place me. "Yes," she said, "I am . . . Miss Bradford." There was a pause before she added, in a tone suggesting both exasperation and anger: "Why?"

We exchanged a few words; then she stood up and raised her walking stick.

A week later I still have the bruise, yellowing but far from faded, as evidence of our meeting.

**M**iss Bradford was my Fourth Class teacher at Chatsworth Primary School in Sydney towards the end of World War II.

The other twenty-seven boys and I in her class assumed she was almost fifty. Why, when she could have been no more than thirty-five, we thought this I am not sure. She was younger than most of our parents, who had yet to reach forty. Her position over us probably had much to do with our unkind

estimate, and she was very schoolmarmish, in appearance if not manner.

The severity of her features was emphasized by the masculine heaviness of her glasses. She wore her hair, dark brown and streaked with grey, pinned in a tight plait on top of her head. Perhaps a person of her own generation would have called her handsome (indeed, as I was to learn, at least one man did), although her big teeth, slightly jutting and obviously false, denied her any claim to beauty, even of an unusual kind.

She was, in the fashion of the 1940's, elaborately made up, and at times during class she would carry out repairs. From behind the upraised lid of her desk we would, at least once a day, see and smell little spurts of powder rising to mingle with the chalk dust that always hung in the air. So she did have some feminine vanity, although the dull simplicity of her clothes was at odds with it.

Forty-six years later in that park, when Miss Bradford agreed that was her name and asked "Why?," I said, "I was in your class at Chatsworth in 1944."

She frowned and breathed hard. "You were what?"

Worried that perhaps I should not have spoken at all, I repeated what I had said.

The words came out as if pushed by bellows: "You're one of those little monsters!"

She stood up, looming over me. She raised her walking stick. In her flushed anger she was controlled enough not to lose her balance. She lashed out. I raised my arm to protect my head, and the stick caught me just below the elbow. The wood jarred the bone, but stronger than the pain was my surprise at the ability of a woman her age to strike so fiercely.

Afraid that another blow would cause serious injury, I stood up and grabbed the stick, but did not pull it from her grasp in case she were to fall over. I looked around, embarrassed that there could be observers of this tussle between an old woman and a man well into his fifties, but we were the only people in that corner of the park.

Still breathing hard, Miss Bradford slumped back onto the bench. I sat beside her, releasing my grip on the stick. She leant forward on it for support.

"I'm sorry about that," she said. "You deserved it, but I'm still sorry."

"As I recall," I said, "you never believed in corporal punishment; you were the only teacher who never caned anyone."



but Gary Lovat said it was his own idea. He claimed that in a year or so the treatment would fix his ears at the correct angle.

Teachers, no less than other adults, must find it hard to warm to ugly children who lack charm or signs of unusual intelligence. Gary Lovat, at least in those days, had neither.

He was a liar and a snoop, faults for which we admired rather than condemned him. His unpopularity with teachers gave him the appeal of a victim who deflected some of the anger that might otherwise have been directed against us.

He brought back intriguing information from his snooping. While he was reporting to us, we never doubted what he said, no matter how outrageous. "Old Sanderson—" referring to the headmaster—"picks his nose," he might say. "And eats it!" (Miss Bradford, having taught us the elements of punctuation, might have been interested in Gary Lovat's mastery of the emphatically misplaced period on those occasions.) Or: "Fat, silly old Turner has holes in her bloomers. And poop marks on them." Some of his claims had nothing to do with school. "I've got a rich auntie in Queensland who's going to shout me a trip round the world after the war. By flying-boat." If we later found that he had been lying, we did not complain. We had no wish

to discourage his enterprise or his inventiveness.

We envied Gary Lovat's ability to ignore or aggravate the teachers' dislike. We never criticized his behavior towards Miss Bradford, although most of us liked her. His cheekiness to her usually stopped short of impertinence, but sometimes it went over the mark into rudeness. He could enrage this usually controlled woman. She would threaten to send him to the headmaster to be caned, a course open to any woman teacher who was herself unwilling to inflict corporal punishment. But Gary Lovat knew she was bluffing, and his knowledge made his own behavior worse and increased her anger.

Gary Lovat was always boasting about his older brother, a soldier fighting in the Pacific war. We were not sure that his brother was actually at the front line, or even that he existed, but Gary Lovat's stories excited us far more than anything Miss Bradford read from books.

One day he said, "My brother shot a Jap and cut this bit off. And sent it to me."

He displayed a matchbox in which, on a bed of red-stained cottonwool, the yellowish tip of a finger lay. It made us feel delightfully sick. It was several days before the rest of us, wondering why it did not rot, like

meat left out of the ice chest, realized the finger was his own, sticking up through a hole in the bottom of the matchbox.

It was Gary Lovat who found out that Miss Bradford was a smoker.

I made use of his discovery. When my father, who was with Air Force ground staff somewhere in northern Australia, returned to Sydney on leave, he brought several cartons of Lucky Strike. American cigarettes, much sought after in those days of rationing, were used for under-the-counter bartering for extra butter or eggs.

"Can I have a packet for Miss Bradford?" I asked.

My mother objected, but my father said, "Why not? From what he says, she can't be such a bad stick. No harm in showing some gratitude or currying a bit of favor."

After school next day I stayed in the classroom as Miss Bradford tidied up. When the other boys had gone, I pushed the cigarettes across her desk. "These are from my father."

She looked at me sternly. "Thank you, but what makes you think I smoke? It's a ridiculous, filthy habit."

"I just know."

She gave a guilty smile. "I can't remember when I last had a Lucky Strike." She picked up the packet, tentatively, not really taking possession. "I'll

telephone your father and thank him."

I interpreted her words as a warning that if I had stolen the cigarettes I would be found out. I appreciated that she was not directly accusing me of theft. "I'm sure he'd think that was nice."

"Or perhaps I could just give you a note for him," she said, showing that she trusted me to deliver it.

After writing the note, she opened the packet and put the cigarettes in the petit-point case she took from her bag. The case looked new and had a *J* embroidered among the flowers.

As I left the room she called after me: "I suppose it was Gary Lovat?"

"Pardon, Miss Bradford?"

"Gary Lovat who uncovered my secret vice?"

I assumed she meant he was the one who had found out she was a smoker. "No, Miss Bradford."

"Fiddlesticks!" But there was no harshness in her voice.

In the park Miss Bradford pressed me to say how we had discovered her more important secret.

"Someone saw you."

"I know that. Where?"

"In the staff room."

"The name of this particular little monster?" Miss Bradford demanded.

My facetiousness did not amuse her.

"You were little monsters," she said. "You destroyed my life. You ruined my one chance of happiness."

The melodramatic words, although out of character with a woman I remembered for the fastidiousness of her language, seemed natural. Their theatricality complemented the anguish in her voice.

"We were what you say," I apologized. "But we didn't know it then."

"Oh, yes, you did," she said. "Little boys can be monsters. There's no underestimating their spite and malice." She turned on me, half-rising from the bench. For a moment I thought she was about to renew her assault, but she sank back on the bench as I edged away from her. "Don't be frightened, little monster," she sneered. "I'm not going to hit you again."

In Third Class, the year before we graduated into Miss Bradford's care, old Mrs. Turner, called back from retirement because of the shortage of teachers during the war, used her cane and rote methods to batter the multiplication tables into us. But Miss Bradford rarely tried to explain to us the more sophisticated mathematics we should have been learning in Fourth Class.

She preferred to encourage us in what she called "the richer pleasures of the heart and mind." She underlined the phrase with a self-mockery that often infused her voice. Like most teachers, she could be sarcastic but we did not resent this, since the sarcasm was directed at herself as much as at her pupils.

Miss Bradford spent much time on art lessons. We were forever taking out our pastels to sketch still-lives of the fruit and flowers she brought to school, or copying Masterpieces of Western Art that she clipped from magazines and pinned to the blackboard.

She taught English, her favorite subject, with great if sometimes unrealistic enthusiasm. She respected the structure of language as much as she loved its music, and if she did not build on what Mrs. Turner had taught us in Third Class, and explain such mathematical mysteries as percentages and compound interest, she gave some of us a lifelong ability to pick a sentence's subject from its predicate and to pick a conjunction from a preposition.

Miss Bradford failed to hold our attention by reading Shakespeare's sonnets or Jane Austen's novels, but she had a pleasant voice and we enjoyed her lively rendering of narrative poems by Tennyson and

other Victorians. We also liked her reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales*. Many years later I sometimes wondered whether things would have been different if she had chosen Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* as part of our education, and her own; but we would probably have become as impatient with that as we had with *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Pride and Prejudice* and begged, "Can't we have something more interesting, please, Miss Bradford, please?"

"How did you little monsters find out?" Miss Bradford demanded as we sat in the park. She tapped the path in front of her with the ferrule of her walking stick.

I hedged, reluctant, even after all those years, to be guilty of "dobbing in" as we called it at school. "But surely you must know?"

"If I knew the answer, I wouldn't be asking." I almost smiled at the schoolmarmish tone. "The headmaster called me in, and later some functionaries at the Education Department had their say. They said they knew what had been going on. Several parents, informed by their little monsters, had complained. I suppose I should have denied the accusation, but it was made with a certainty that seemed to make a denial

pointless. I hoped an admission would help the 'scandal' blow over, make it a nine day wonder. I was also foolish enough not to wish to involve you boys even more deeply than you already were. I still had some faith in the innocence of children and the need to protect it."

"That was generous of you." If the words sounded trite or condescending, Miss Bradford showed no reaction.

"I soon realized," she said, "that we were the ones who needed protecting, from you." She tapped at the path for a while. "I suppose Gary Lovat had something to do with it?"

"I don't know," I lied.

"Fiddlesticks!" said Miss Bradford.

**G**ary Lovat was the class character.

He was ugly in what I now think of as a negative way. His lack of color made him stand out. His thin, pale hair started far back from his forehead, as if, at the age of nine, he was already going bald. He had a big face, milky-complexioned and freckled. The tight mouth and green eyes were packed too close to his tiny nose. His ears were huge, not just sticking out but protruding forward. They were held back with surgical sticking-plaster. We assumed that this was at the insistence of his parents,



"I'm afraid I don't remember."

"Fiddlesticks! You remember well enough. You're just not telling." It was as if I was in school, being cross-examined by a teacher about a misdemeanor. Miss Bradford responded to my unspoken feelings, but it would be an exaggeration to say she smiled. "Well, if you won't tell, you won't tell, I suppose, and there's nothing I can do about it. I can hardly keep you in after school or send a note to your parents."

Now that her anger seemed to be diminishing, I felt that I could leave, but when I started to stand up she said, "I've always been sure it was Gary Lovat."

"No, it wasn't he."

"If you can't remember who it was," she said with a school-teacher's ruthless logic, "how can you be so sure who it wasn't?"

"I'm just sure it wasn't, Miss Bradford." The words sounded like the lies of a stubborn schoolboy. I attempted a diversion. "I'm surprised you remember his name."

"I remember all your names, all the little monsters in that class. I used to lie awake at night, reciting them aloud to the wall. It was like counting sheep, only to stay awake, to relive the pain." Again I was struck by the unexpected the-

atricality of her words, and it must have shown in my face. "Melodrama offends you, does it? But for some of us life becomes . . . larger than life. Only exaggerated language can describe it."

There was nothing to say to that, and for a few more minutes we were silent again.

"Of all the little monsters," Miss Bradford said suddenly, "Gary Lovat was the most monstrous. Why did he have to make my life such a misery, even before . . . before all the trouble? Why did you let him? Why did all you other little monsters have to conspire with him?"

Back to tapping at the path with her stick, she lapsed into another silence. After a few minutes she looked at me, her face crumpled with the hurt of memories. "Only God and the Education Department knew why boys and girls were at separate schools then, but until that dreadful year I liked little boys, liked teaching them. You seemed more interesting than little girls, more immersed in life." She returned the conversation to Gary Lovat. "That awful blank, white face. Those freckles. Those nasty, watery eyes. Those ears."

"Held back with sticking-plaster, you remember?"

"Of course I remember! Gary Lovat! I wonder what became

of him. Something horrible, I hope."

"He won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford," I said. "He stayed in England. He's something big in nuclear physics."

"Wants to blow up the world, I dare say, but can't work out how to do it without blowing himself up, too."

**G**ary Lovat often used one of Miss Bradford's favorite "teaching" methods as an occasion to go snooping.

Much of the time in Fourth Class was taken up with reading Hugh Lofting's Doctor Doolittle stories. By a process of elimination—Dickens and the Brontë sisters were among the first to go—Miss Bradford found that most of us could comfortably read aloud and hold the attention of the others with the Doctor Doolittle books. Several times a week a boy kept the rest of us quiet by standing in front of the class and reading two or three chapters from the adventures of the man who could talk to the animals. While the reading was in progress, Miss Bradford often left the room, having warned us to behave "or there'll be no more Doctor Doolittle for a week."

During these reading sessions, if Miss Bradford was out of the room, Gary Lovat would leave, too. If he was seen by a

teacher, he would claim an urgent bladder or bowel problem.

On one of his unauthorized patrols around the school Gary Lovat found out that Miss Bradford smoked. She was strict in obeying the headmaster's rule that teachers should not smoke in front of the children, and we knew nothing of her addiction. But Gary Lovat saw smoke coming through the half-open door of the staff room; then he went outside to check, by climbing onto a bench in the playground and peeping through the window. It was risky, but Gary Lovat scorned the dangers of being caught. It was one of the things that the rest of us admired about him.

Several months after detecting the smoke, Gary Lovat found there was fire. It was on another of his snooping expeditions, and again he looked through the staff room window.

He kept the secret to himself for a long time, but teased us with hints.

We knew he had learnt something because when he returned to the classroom his face was pink and his eyes sparkled as we had never seen before.

Miss Bradford had returned a few minutes earlier and noted his empty seat, with what seemed to me—or am I imagining things well after the event?—some alarm. But she said nothing until he came back.

"Another emergency visit to the toilet, I suppose?"

Gary Lovat gave her a cheeky look with those now brilliant eyes before saying with slow emphasis: "I think that's what I was doing, Miss Bradford."

Although she must have known he had been up to something, she did not challenge him further, did not even exclaim "Fiddlesticks!", her usual response when she suspected a lie.

We, too, knew that Gary Lovat had been up to something, but all he would say was: "I've got a secret."

Any other boy who said that would be accused of pulling our legs. Although we suspected Gary Lovat was doing that, we knew from experience that there was a chance he had really learnt something interesting. His ability to keep our curiosity aroused was another reason we admired him.

After several days of teasing he said, "It's something about old Ryan. But that's all I'm telling you now."

"My 'confession,'" Miss Bradford said in the park, "only made things worse for both of us, especially Kevin."

"So that was his name," I said. "Mr. Ryan. Funny how kids in those days just knew their teachers by their surnames."

I had, in fact, known Mr. Ryan's first name, but I lied out of courteous desire to suggest to Miss Bradford that not all the details of her life had been known to the boys.

"Kids, as you call them, kids these days address their teachers by their first names, or so I hear," Miss Bradford said, unexpectedly taking the conversation in another direction. "And you? Have you any kids of your own, any little monsters?"

"Two daughters, grown up, of course."

"There's no justice," Miss Bradford sighed. "Monsters should have little monsters, just to know the hurt they can inflict." She sighed again, almost groaned. "I had a son."

"Not—"

"No, not Kevin's. Kevin told me not to wait for him." She dabbed angrily at her eyes. "He died five years after it all happened."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"Why should you? It was hardly headline news. But don't say you're sorry. I don't believe you."

Argument on that score was pointless, so I said, "About your son?"

"After all the fuss, of course, I couldn't get a teaching job anywhere. I went to Adelaide, the ideal city, village really, so enchanted by its own peccadilloes that it had never heard of

mine. I became a secretary in a law office and married one of the solicitors. He was the worst sort of man, a bully and a mother's boy."

"So why—"

"Desperation was still a respectable motive in those days. I was nearly forty." All sign of tears gone, Miss Bradford followed a sexual train of thought. "Not that I was without experience, apart from Kevin, though it was limited, even for a person of my generation."

I felt it proper to look embarrassed by this admission, but Miss Bradford did not notice as she continued. "The boy, his son, turned out to be exactly like him. He had sly green eyes, like Gary Lovat's."

I waited while she considered how much more she would tell me.

"Of course I left them. The man's mother was happy enough to take over care of the budding monster as well as the full-grown one. I never saw the boy again. Perhaps he's dead." She sounded almost optimistic. "I never bothered to get divorced, so, strictly speaking, Miss Bradford, is Mrs.—no, I won't tell you my name—Mrs. So-and-so, who ran away from her husband and came to Melbourne to live with her widowed sister, who died soon after and left her able to live in a style—" she stroked the fur coat

"—to which she has become accustomed."

"And among friends, I hope?"

"I was never the friendly type," she said. "My experience with Kevin taught me how dangerous that can be. No, I just mope about, feed the cat, go for walks. And read."

"You would," I said warmly. "That's something this little monster's grateful to you for. You gave us a love of—" I almost said *literature*, but that would have sounded pompous. "You gave us a love of books." That merely sounded sententious. I looked at the leather-bound book on the bench beside her. "One of your favorites? Jane Austen, Tennyson?"

Miss Bradford pushed the book towards me. "At your age you should know better than to judge a book by its cover."

The leather, tooled with gilt arabesques, was a jacket rather than a cover. Inside was a book called *In Passion's Realm*. I suppressed the smirk aroused by its lush opening sentences.

"I can't remember when I last read a real book," Miss Bradford said. "When you've lived through the sort of experiences I had, literature, so-called, seems insignificant. I'd rather find entertainment in honest tripe." For the first time, she looked embarrassed. She stood up. "I must be off. I can't say it's been a pleasure meeting you again."



I stood up, too, and asked on impulse: "May I offer you a drink? I'm staying at the Hilton. It's just across the park."

"I live near here," she snapped. "I know where the Hilton is."

"So you'll join me?"

Her tone was deliberately ungracious. "My life's not eventful enough, now, for me to turn down an invitation, even from a little monster." She gave me a sardonic glance. "You haven't weathered well, little monster."

She had a point. I'm fat and jowly, and what is left of my hair is wispy and grey, almost white. I hoped I did not look to her like an adult version of Gary Lovat.

In the Hilton's cocktail bar, before I could ask what she would like to drink, she told the waitress: "A rum and Coke, please. Not that colorless stuff; real rum."

As she lit a cigarette, she noticed my interested glance at the petit-point case. "Kevin gave it to me."

"And I gave you some cigarettes once. You put them in that case."

She puffed out a smoke ring. "Lucky Strikes. I remember. I remember most things." She held up her glass. "I'll pay for this."

"It's on me, please."

"Not the money. I'll pay you

by telling you what your prurient little monster's mind wants to know about me and Kevin Ryan."

**M**r. Ryan must have been at least ten years older than Miss Bradford, although back in 1944 we boys did not think there was any significant difference in their ages. He was short but sturdily built, with a neat grey mustache that emphasized his suntan, and he limped. Adopting the language of the piratical adventures Miss Bradford read us as a reward for especially good behavior, we said he had a rolling gait and supposed he had been a seafaring man.

As the one who corrected this supposition, I enjoyed for a few days the glory usually awarded to one of Gary Lovat's secrets or lies. *Australian Heroes of the Great War*, one of the books in the school's small library, informed me that Kevin Ryan, an army sergeant, had won the Military Medal by capturing an enemy machine gun post at Gallipoli in 1915 before going on to other deeds in France. Beside the account of his bravery was a photograph of a slouch-hatted soldier who was clearly a younger version of the man who taught Fifth Class.

Towards the end of the year, in the first weeks of summer,

while Gary Lovat was still teasingly holding back details of what he had seen through the staff room window, we were put in Mr. Ryan's charge one afternoon so that he could take us swimming. This was instead of the ball games we played once a week in a local park, to meet the requirements of Sport and Physical Recreation, as laid down by the headmaster's timetable. The excursion to the baths at Balmoral was a notable treat, because Mr. Ryan, whose life-saving certificate made him the only teacher qualified to supervise swimming, was usually busy with his own pupils, the boys of Fifth Class.

We were disappointed to see, when he had changed into his swimming trunks, that he did not have a crucifix on his naked chest. We knew he was a Catholic, and as nominally Protestant students of the state school system, we were fascinated that some men, perhaps even Australian heroes, wore what we scornfully called necklaces. But if Mr. Ryan disappointed, or perhaps reassured, us by not wearing a crucifix, he had something more interesting to reveal. All the toes but the big one were missing from his left foot. Now we knew the reason for his limp, or rolling gait.

Our parents had warned us that it was rude to notice disabilities, but of course Gary

Lovat asked, "Did the Jerries do that in the other war, sir?"

"No, it was a mate of mine," Mr. Ryan said, "being careless with his rifle when we were getting through some barbed wire in France. But I've got no complaints. It got me home from the front a year early."

We looked disapproving. Mr. Ryan's explanation sounded cowardly. Gary Lovat's brother, the real or imaginary hero of the fight against the Japanese, wouldn't have said anything like that.

The next day, during the mid-morning playground break, Gary Lovat, professing disgust with Mr. Ryan's account of how he had been wounded, at last told us what he had seen through the staff room window.

"They were kissing," he said. "Him and her. Old Ryan and old Bradford. And not only that."

Gary Lovat refused to say more until after school. We were very quiet in class for the rest of the day. When the bell rang, Miss Bradford said as she dismissed us, "You've been very quiet and attentive, boys. I hope your good behavior doesn't evaporate by Monday."

On Friday afternoons we often hung around in the playground, throwing a tennis ball, starting a game of chasings or making those prolonged farewells enjoyed by children who will not see much of one an-

other for a few days. But this Friday our only interest was to hear more from Gary Lovat.

He took his time getting to the point. "He had his hand on her top part. Like this." With a dirty grin, Gary Lovat put a hand inside his shirt and rubbed his chest. "And the other right up her dress. Like this." Grinning even more, he slid the other hand up the leg of his shorts and groped ecstatically.

We were confused about the mechanics of sex. Although some of us had heard exactly what adults were supposed to get up to, we did not believe it. But we knew married people did *some* strange things that unmarried people, or people who were not married to each other, were not supposed to do. Mr. Ryan was married. Miss Bradford was not (she had told us she lived with her mother, an odd arrangement for someone we thought of as being too old to have a mother).

We did not doubt Gary Lovat's maliciously compelling recital. We knew that what he had seen Miss Bradford and Mr. Ryan doing was very wrong. We were shocked.

When Miss Bradford waved her glass and said she would pay for her drink by telling me about the affair, I replied, "Not if it causes you pain." My voice lacked sincerity.

"What a smug little monster you've become! But I'm not surprised. You were self-important as a child, so simperingly eager to please, so disgustingly polite."

I said nothing, flattered that she should distinguish me from the hundreds of boys she must have taught, but embarrassed by the accuracy of her memory.

"Of course it causes me pain," she said. "But it's a pain I can use to warm my old age. At least I had a big adventure in my life. That's something. Most people lead such a dull existence." She sent another smoke ring drifting through the lounge. "Remember *Brief Encounter*?" I nodded. "It came out a year after it, after it all happened."

"My mother liked to think she looked like Celia Johnson," I said.

"I can't claim any resemblance. And Kevin didn't look like Trevor Howard. But there were similarities between us and the film. For one thing, Kevin had a friend who lent us a flat. But we didn't, I'm glad to say, hold back like silly little Celia and Trevor. Oh no! Ours was a grand passion with the reins right off." There was that self-mockery in her voice, but pride too. "We couldn't keep our hands off each other."

I remembered Gary Lovat's vivid pantomime in the playground, one hand in his shirt,

the other up the leg of his shorts.

"Remember the music in the film?" Miss Bradford asked.

"Rachmaninov. The Third Piano Concerto."

"Wrong, you little monster. The Second, that's what they used for *Brief Encounter*." Miss Bradford hummed the opening bars, waving her cigarette in time. "Well, if Kevin and I didn't behave like Trevor and Celia, we were certainly more in tune with the music. Right over the top." Her eyes brightened, either at the memory or her choice of words. "The odd thing was that his friend, the one with the flat, had a gramophone. The Rachmaninov was among his records. We played it once, afterwards, as we lay in bed." She hummed a few more bars, this time of the tune I recognized as the sad, languorous second movement of the concerto.

After that, for a few moments, Miss Bradford was silent. Subdued by her frankness, I assumed that she wanted to take her time without any prompting from me. I also felt sorry for her, genuinely sorry, though I was not about to risk her ridicule by saying so. I was sorry for this woman whose life had been ruined by the desperate act of a man passionately in love with her. That was the truth, no matter how much she

tried to blame us, the little monsters.

"I'd like another drink." Her voice suggested she was beginning to enjoy herself. When the drinks had been delivered, she said, "I met Kevin's wife once, in line at the butcher's of all places, when they were out shopping together. Remember queuing up with ration books for just about everything?" I nodded as Miss Bradford continued. "She was what people used to call 'a pretty little thing,' which was a polite way of saying insipid. I was so different, Kevin said. He called me 'a jolly handsome sort.' It made me sound like a horse, especially with these teeth, but he meant it as a compliment. She was a Catholic, too, of course. Kevin said she should have been a nun. Probably most unfaithful men say that about their wives. Do you say that, little monster?" But she did not wait for an answer. "Divorcing her was out of the question. Not that I deluded myself Kevin would ever have left her, whatever their religion. In some ways he didn't have a great deal of backbone."

"He won the Military Medal at Gallipoli!"

"Oh, that," said Miss Bradford, "Of course he was a brave man, physically."

"And if he didn't leave her, he did—"

"I'm coming to that."



I realized that Miss Bradford was indeed enjoying herself. I gestured to the waitress to bring two more drinks.

**O**n the Monday that Miss Bradford had hoped would be marked by our continued attentive behavior, it was she who was exceptionally quiet. So were all the other teachers. Mr. Sanderson, the headmaster, had announced at morning assembly that Mr. Ryan would not be at school for a few days. "He has suffered a most tragic loss. Mrs. Ryan has, um, passed on."

Mr. Ryan never returned to the school, and all that week Miss Bradford looked strained. On the Tuesday of the following week she was called to the headmaster's office. We speculated on what this meant, in between fitful readings from a Doctor Doolittle book.

When she returned to class, she was carrying a large cardboard box. She said nothing, but every now and then gave us a hostile look that warned us not to speak. Into the box she put articles from her desk. She took a Masterpiece of Western Art—Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*—from the blackboard where she had pinned it for us to copy, and rolled it up and put it with the other things.

Still without speaking, she walked across the room to the

door where she paused, holding the box awkwardly against her chest.

"You're monsters, all of you, revolting little monsters," Miss Bradford said with cold precision. "I would like to wish you every possible pain and failure in life."

After she walked through the door, she never returned to the school. If any of the boys ever saw her again, they did not mention it to the others.

"Whether Bernadette Ryan really should have been a nun I don't know," Miss Bradford said as we sipped our third round of drinks, "though with a name like that she had a head start. She was certainly neurotic. She used to alarm Kevin by leaving suicide notes and disappearing for hours. But we doubted that she would kill herself. Her spiteful Catholicism was too strong for that."

Miss Bradford stood up, and I helped her off with her fur coat as she said, "It's getting hot in here. Or is it just the drink?" She made a sound that might have passed for a giggle except that there was no answering expression on her face. "Don't be worried. I'm not getting skittish. One more—" she drained her glass "—and then I'll totter off home."

We went through a long silence. New drinks had arrived

before Miss Bradford said, "Those suicide notes gave us the idea. I had my doubts, however, about Kevin's ability to go through with it. At my suggestion he, the devoted husband, told her she might cure her death wish by confronting death. She agreed." Miss Bradford gave a contemptuous snort. "The silly woman actually agreed. The confrontation was to be at the Gap, where people were always jumping off in the 1940's . . . I wonder if they still do?"

"I'm not sure." I was more interested in the past. "So it was suicide, not murder?"

During the trial, the events that followed the departure from school of Mr. Ryan and Miss Bradford were reported in the daily newspapers, though not in much detail. The weekly scandal sheet *Fact*, which our parents kept from us, had more information, although the copy that Gary Lovat stole from a shop said nothing about Miss Bradford. But we all knew that what happened to Mr. Ryan was the result of what he and Miss Bradford had been doing in the staff room.

"Who's telling this story?" Miss Bradford complained when I suggested that, contrary to my recollection, Bernadette Ryan had killed herself.

"Sorry to interrupt," I said.

"Her decision to 'confront death' by going with Kevin to the Gap caught us almost on the hop." Miss Bradford's voice had a faint slur. She might not be skittish, but she was a little drunk. "When Kevin rang on the Saturday morning and told me, I couldn't believe it at first." She paused, as if to muster events into their correct sequence. "Of course I couldn't go with them, but I promised Kevin I'd meet them at the Gap. I felt that if we told her what was going on between Kevin and me, that would really push her over the edge, so to speak." She gave an unsmiling chuckle. "In the evening, so that they would merge with the Saturday crowd of people around at that hour, Kevin and Bernadette caught the tram out to Watsons Bay, near the Gap. I went separately, much earlier, and spent the afternoon reading—*Mansfield Park*, I remember—in a quiet corner among rocks at the end of a beach. When it was dark, I walked to the Gap at the appointed time. I was a little nervous, not so much at the prospect of what was to happen, just the nervousness a woman feels in a lonely place at night."

Miss Bradford recalled her surprise at seeing her lover and his wife standing there, close to the edge of the cliff, in the wind blowing in from the Pacific. It seemed to her beyond reason

that even the most neurotic woman would agree to "confront death."

"There was no need to introduce myself," Miss Bradford said, "since Bernadette and I had already met. As soon as she saw me, she knew Kevin and I were up to no good."

"Without any preamble, I said—or shouted, to make myself heard over the crash of the waves at the bottom of the cliff—I shouted, 'Why don't you save everybody a lot of trouble and yourself a lot of unhappiness by jumping?' She didn't, of course. She didn't even try to run away. She just stood there, in a state of shock, I suppose. 'Jump!' Kevin whispered at her. I was worried that his heart wasn't really in it. 'Jump!' I called. Bernadette just screamed, wordlessly. We all kept screaming—Kevin did summon up more . . . more enthusiasm—with her standing there. It seemed to go on forever, but it must have been only a matter of minutes, perhaps seconds. Then one push, and that was that."

Miss Bradford had raised her voice, though not loudly enough to attract attention in our corner of the lounge; and her face was flushed.

Calming down, she took another sip, blew another smoke ring. "Kevin was most concerned about my wellbeing and

my good name. We couldn't risk being seen together. We didn't have a car—hardly anyone did in those days. He wanted me to be the first to leave, to go some distance away and catch a tram home. But I insisted that he go first. He had to try to establish some sort of alibi. The anxious husband who'd ring the police with a story about looking for his wife, who hadn't come home from work—Bernadette had a part-time job as a typist—how he was worried because he'd just found a suicide note."

I risked some prompting. "But the friend, the one who lent you the flat, how did you know he wouldn't say something to the police?"

"They were at Gallipoli and in France together. They were as close as brothers. He was the one who accidentally shot Kevin's toes off. He knew the misery Bernadette was making of Kevin's life. It was you little monsters who ruined everything. Some parents, probably Gary Lovat's but others too, told the headmaster about us. Then the headmaster went to the police as well as the Education Department."

"Until then, Bernadette's death was seen as just another suicide at the Gap. But when I was *unmasked* as the Other Woman, the police put more energy into their inquiries. They found people who recognized

Kevin as a man who'd been around Watsons Bay that evening and on the tram."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"I've already told you I don't believe you."

"But—"

"But nothing." Miss Bradford put the cigarette case in her bag. "For a man who lacked backbone, Kevin behaved very well. The police never suspected I was with him and Bernadette at the Gap. My mother, who had her suspicions about what I'd been up to that night—though she was never unwise enough to challenge me about it—said I'd been home all afternoon and evening, reading *Mansfield Park*. I didn't even have to give evidence at Kevin's trial. He confessed to having killed Bernadette. . . . Life the judge gave him, a minimum of twenty years, though his death—I never found out the cause—reduced it to five." Miss Bradford stood up. "I must be off. The cat will be hungry."

I helped her into her coat, and we walked out of the hotel. Cars already had their lights on. It

would soon be dark.

"Can I get you a taxi?" I asked.

"No. I live quite close. And don't offer to escort me home. I've no wish for you to know where I live."

When I held out my hand, Miss Bradford said, "In a strange way, I've almost enjoyed our chat about old times, though when I started I didn't think I would. I've never told anyone, not even my sister, as much as I've told you. But shaking hands? Too much like a gesture of forgiveness. I'll never forgive you little monsters. Never."

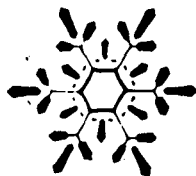
She turned and walked, stiff and tall, along the street, but had gone only a few steps when she turned and beckoned to me.

"One other thing," she said, "that I might as well mention, since I've already told you so much." She seemed to have second thoughts. She moved as if to walk away. I put my hand on her arm. She stopped, and took a deep breath.

"I was the one," Miss Bradford said, smiling for the first time, "who pushed her over."



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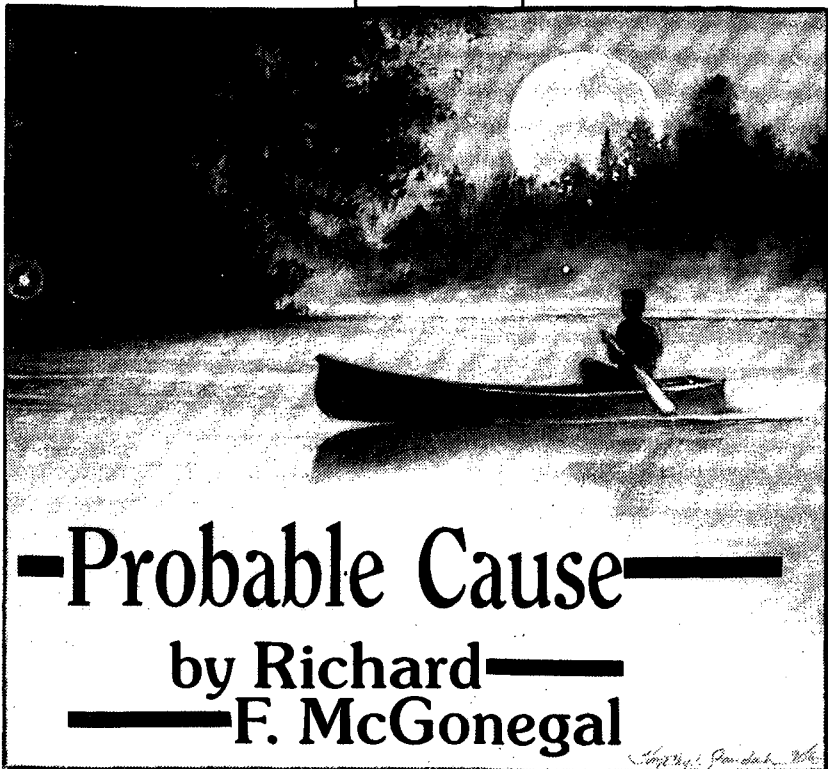
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YTSH-7



# —Probable Cause—

by Richard  
—F. McGonegal

**S**heriff Francis Hood hated waiting and he hated kidnappings. Most of all, he hated waiting out a kidnapping.

Other crimes—assault, armed robbery, even murder—were comparatively routine, like diagramming simple sentences: perpetrator commits felony; sheriff pursues; sheriff apprehends.

A kidnapping, however, sprouted countless independent clauses, all ending in question marks. When would the kidnapper call? What ransom would be demanded? How would the ransom be delivered? Could the department intervene without jeopardizing the victim? Was the victim already dead?

Hood stared at the photograph of the five-year-old girl,



which lay in a small clearing in the center of his otherwise cluttered oak desk. He shifted the picture back and forth with a stubby forefinger, as if the motion somehow would dislodge answers.

In any of those more routine cases, Hood would already be on the move. The victim would have been turned over to family, friends, physicians, psychologists, or morticians, and Hood would be filling the role that suited him most comfortably—that of tracker.

The sheriff was acutely aware of his weaknesses as well as his strengths. Although he was not devoid of compassion, he was ill-equipped to provide support or healing; he was best-equipped to avenge.

A kidnapping did not play to his strengths. Because the victim remained at the mercy of the abductor, the crime fostered paralysis, not movement. Instead of dropping down on the felon's trail with a relentless determination that often bordered on obsession, Hood was forced to wait. He was forced to wait until the kidnapper made a move, forced to consider questions for which he had no answers, forced to contemplate how one slight miscue on his part could prove fatal for the victim.

The sheriff picked up the photograph and studied it. Meghan

Albert wore her long brown hair in two pigtails, each tied with a pink bow. Her piercing brown eyes, button nose, and broad smile combined in an expression of youthful wonder and vitality.

"Can I get you anything, sheriff?"

Hood looked up. His chief deputy, Gus "Wally" Wallendorf, stood in the open doorway.

"Yeah, Wally. Bring me back a kidnapper."

"I meant to eat."

"Okay. Filet him and broil him first," Hood joked.

Wally smiled. The tense, somber mood which had permeated the department for the past three days had affected everyone, and he was pleased that Hood was trying to break the spell, even if morbid remarks seemed the only available method.

"Don't worry," Wally said. "We'll get her back okay."

Hood glanced at the clock—it was five past six P.M. "Lester still out at the Albert house?" he asked.

"Yeah," Wally replied. "I'll relieve him in a couple of hours."

Hood pondered a moment. "Where you headed?"

"Over to Millie's for a sub sandwich."

"Bring me back a pepperoni and muenster with extra oil and vinegar, a bag of regular chips, a couple of pickles, and

a large root beer."

"Gotcha," Wally said. He didn't bother to write it down; the order was customary.

"Anything new come in?" Hood asked. The question was automatic, unexpectant. He knew Wally would already have informed him of any developments.

"No."

"Well, let's take another look at what we've got when you get back," Hood said. "Maybe we can spot something we overlooked."

Wally nodded. He and his boss had reviewed the evidence more than a dozen times, both individually and jointly. Wally knew another review offered little hope, but he agreed it was preferable to doing nothing.

When Wally left, Hood turned his attention back to the photograph. The longer he stared at the image of Meghan Albert, the more he felt eager to move. He leaned his massive frame back in his chair and waited for Wally to return.

**H**ood watched curiously as his deputy parceled out the foil-wrapped booty from the brown bag. For every item he passed to the sheriff, Wally kept two for himself. Hood always marveled at how someone who ate so much could remain so thin.

Although Wally was the taller

of the two, he was lanky and sinewy and carried only a fraction of the sheriff's bulk. Hood was hardly obese, but he was broad and solid, with thick, powerful biceps, forearms, and thighs. Though Wally's uniform seemed almost to dangle from his frame, Hood's was well-fitted and worn with military precision.

Their faces were also a study in incongruity. Wally's features were angular, almost gaunt, and his head was topped with unruly dark brown hair. By contrast, the sheriff's round face, perpetual smile, and close-cropped sandy hair lent him an almost boyish appearance. Hood typically made a first impression that mirrored his demeanor—he was friendly and affable but, if required, would prove a formidable foe.

The two men unwrapped their respective dinners wordlessly and spread them on opposite sides of the sheriff's desk, then alternately chewed, perused files, and talked as they reviewed the case.

Meghan Albert had been abducted three days ago, a Monday, while walking the three block route from her home to afternoon kindergarten at Riverview School.

School officials telephoned her mother, Judy Albert, about the unexcused absence, and Mrs. Albert called neighbors and the

parents of neighborhood children while school officials conducted a comprehensive search of the facility and grounds.

When Meghan was not found, Mrs. Albert telephoned her husband Curtis, president of the First Community Bank, at his office. He notified the sheriff's department before leaving for home.

Two deputies were dispatched to the Albert residence and they, along with Mr. Albert, drove the route to the school and talked with the school principal. Mrs. Albert was instructed to stay at home near the telephone in case someone called with information about her daughter's whereabouts.

When immediate contacts and a preliminary search yielded nothing, additional manpower was requested and a comprehensive search of the neighborhood began. By mid-afternoon, Meghan's bookbag was found in a narrow wooded area flanking a creek that ran between two houses. The woods widened and thickened beyond the back yards and the creek meandered down to a gravel access road and, beyond, to the river.

The information was radioed to headquarters, and the search was intensified. Hood and Wally speculated that the girl, at best, was lost, or, at worst, had drowned. They also entertained the possibility of an abduction

and left for the Albert house to install a recording device on the telephone.

Prior to their arrival, the telephone rang there, startling an already-anxious Judy Albert. The male caller, according to her, spoke slowly and calmly in a low, guttural tone obviously designed to disguise his voice. He said he had her daughter, that she was fine and would be returned if his instructions were followed. His instructions were: "Don't call the cops; tell your husband to get a hundred thousand dollars in cash, small bills, unmarked; and don't do anything stupid." He said he would give them "a couple days" to gather the money and would contact them with further instructions.

When Hood and Wally arrived, Mrs. Albert met them at the door and collapsed into Hood's arms.

Hood lost little time seeking a paper trail. He pored through documents and transcripts in search of a suspect—someone who had a criminal record for kidnapping or unlawful detainment. He scrutinized lists from the Division of Probation and Parole, the Missouri Uniform Law Enforcement System, the National Crime Information Center, Field Interrogation Reports, even from the Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center.

The effort yielded five suspects, but Hood quickly eliminated three—two in St. Louis and one in Kansas City who could not have been in central Missouri during the abduction, according to their parole officers.

He studied the files of the two remaining suspects. One, Robert Mayfair, had served seven years for kidnapping, then violated his parole by failing to report to his parole officer. His whereabouts were unknown. The second suspect, Lance Hoelscher, had served three years for unlawful detainment, had successfully completed his parole, and was no longer required to report to a parole officer. His whereabouts also were unknown.

Hood and Wally checked local and area telephone directories, the Division of Motor Vehicles, and the Department of Revenue, but none yielded a current address for either man. The only information they gleaned was that Hoelscher's driver's license had expired three weeks ago and had not been renewed.

Hood pushed the files to the side of his desk and looked at his deputy who was nibbling the ragged remainder of his sandwich. "See anything new? Anything we might have missed?"

Wally shook his head.

Hood leaned back in his chair, wadded up a foil wrapper and lofted it, in a high arc, toward the wastebasket. It bounced on the rim and fell in.

"Nice shot," Wally offered.

Hood's telephone rang. He answered, then listened, his expression darkening as his smile digressed into a deep frown. "Sit tight," he said into the receiver. "I'll be there shortly."

"What?" Wally asked.

Hood was out of his chair, striding toward the large county map which hung on the wall behind his desk. "That was Lester," he said. "Albert gave him the slip."

"How?"

"He told Lester and his wife he was going out for some cigarettes. When he didn't return right away, Lester checked to see if the ransom was still in the bedroom where they'd stashed it. It's gone."

"He's making the drop," Wally said.

Hood made no reply to the obvious. He poked at the map and ordered: "I want roadblocks here on Route M, Route 00, and U.S. 50 here and here." He paused a moment while Wally snatched a pad and pen from the desk and noted the instructions. "I want U.S. 54 blocked at the north and south county lines, and I want roadblocks on the bridges at A and AA. I don't

care if you have to rent cars and call out every auxiliary member, I want this county sealed tight. This guy will be long gone once he's got the money, if he isn't already."

"Gotcha," Wally said. He was relaying the instructions to the dispatcher when Hood passed them, punched open the front door, and left. The glass pane rattled in his wake.

**A**lthough Curtis Albert had read the letter nearly a dozen times, he knew after his first reading there were certain responsibilities a parent could not abdicate, foremost among them the welfare of his only child.

The typewritten letter—in an envelope bearing Albert's name and marked "personal and confidential"—had been found Thursday morning in the overnight deposit box and delivered immediately to the bank president's office.

The letter read: "Put money in a sturdy bag. Lock in car trunk. Drive to outdoor pay telephone, E-Z Convenience Store, 50 and Myrtle. 7 P.M. tonight. Come alone. No cops. I'll be watching."

Raising the money had been difficult for Albert, but not impossible. Being president of a community bank was hardly equal to being chairman of the

holding company, but he was not without resources. He cashed a number of investments, emptied the nest egg he had set aside for retirement, added the savings he had started for Meghan's college education, and took out two loans.

At six forty-five P.M. Thursday, he told his wife and Lester he was going out to buy cigarettes. The bag containing the ransom already was locked in his car trunk; earlier that evening—while his wife was in the kitchen and Lester was in the bathroom—Albert had slipped into the bedroom and substituted an identical bag stuffed with newspapers.

Albert drove to the designated location, paced in front of the pay phones and, precisely at seven P.M., answered on the first ring.

"Mr. Albert?" the caller inquired.

The affected, whispery voice caused an involuntary shiver. "Yes," he answered.

"You bring the money?"

"Yes."

"And you're alone?"

"Yes. Can I speak to my daughter?"

"Soon. First, I'm going to lead you on a little tour. I'll be watching—not all the time, but you won't know when. If I see anything I don't like, the tour stops. Understand?"

"Yes," Albert replied. Even

his monosyllables were shaky.

"Good. Pay phone in the laundromat at 201 Fisk. I'll call at seven fifteen." The line went dead.

Albert's "tour" took him to pay phones at four separate locations around the city. The fourth call instructed him to drive to the boat access ramp on the Moreau River, eight miles east of the city limits.

The parking area was dark and deserted when he arrived. Albert surveyed the empty lot, then walked down to the river bank where a small jonboat rested on the shore. He looked upstream and downstream.

"Mr. Albert."

The voice startled him. He looked around furtively, then focused on the boat. He picked up the walkie-talkie lying on the seat and pressed the button. "Yes."

He was instructed to put the money in the boat, row across the river, secure the boat, and walk to the light.

As he approached the far bank, he saw a faint glimmer. He followed the instructions and stepped cautiously among the trees until he reached a clearing where a small lantern glowed.

"Now, Mr. Albert," said the disembodied voice on the walkie-talkie. "Put the bag and radio beside the lantern, remove your shirt, tie it around your

eyes like a blindfold, and raise your arms."

Albert did so with trembling hands. He waited, acutely aware of his vulnerability and fear. Within moments, he heard footsteps behind him, then the voice, no longer from the walkie-talkie. "Keep still while I pat you down."

Albert flinched at the man's touch, but steadied himself.

"Sit down," the voice ordered.

Albert sat on the ground. Again he waited. He heard the bag's zipper open, then close; he heard footsteps recede, bushes rustle, then footsteps approaching anew. He felt something settle beside him, felt a firm grip seize his wrist and guide his hand to another, smaller hand.

"Meghan?" he asked. His voice quivered with uncertainty.

"Daddy?" she whispered.

"Are you all right?" Already his tears were coming from beneath the blindfold.

"Yes, Daddy."

"I want you to count out loud to one thousand," the voice ordered. "Then you can take the boat and leave. Don't rush it," he admonished.

When Albert reached one thousand, he removed his blindfold. The bag and the walkie-talkie were gone, the lantern was gone, and the man was gone.

Albert untied his daughter's



blouse blindfold and hugged her close. He put the blouse back on her, tried to button it with fumbling fingers, and failed. Then he picked her up and took her home.

When Hood saw Albert and his daughter coming up the front sidewalk to their home, he wanted to embrace her and chastise him. He stepped aside and allowed Mrs. Albert to hug them both, then he interceded.

As the sheriff gathered information and evidence, he altered some roadblocks to plug gaps in the circle surrounding the river access; he dispatched deputies to examine the jonboat and to identify and find its owner; he sent Lester to deliver the blouse blindfold and the kidnapper's ransom letter and envelope to the state highway patrol crime lab.

The most frustrating aspect of the interrogation was learning that neither Meghan nor her father had seen the abductor. Meghan had been grabbed from behind and immediately blindfolded, bound, and gagged. She believed she was transported in a van, because the surface beneath her felt more like a carpeted floor than a cloth or vinyl car seat. She told the sheriff her ears were plugged before she was taken from the vehicle. The only information she could offer about the past

three days was that she believed she had been lying on a mattress and that the gag was removed only for brief periods when she was fed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, potato chips, and water. "Mostly, I cried a lot," she told Hood.

"You're a brave little girl," Hood replied.

She looked at him, then at her mother and father, who were seated beside her on the sofa. She leaned toward her mother and hugged her.

Hood went out to the front porch, gently closing the screen door behind him. He took a deep breath of the cool evening air and glanced back inside at the five-year-old child nestled securely in her mother's arms.

"Sheriff," Wally called, as he hurried across the living room. "I've got dispatch on the phone. Hoelscher just ran into the roadblock on 00."

"What unit?" Hood asked.

"Five-seven-one."

"I'll talk to 'em direct on the radio. Tell dispatch."

Wally rushed back to the telephone as Hood hurried to his cruiser. He snatched the microphone from its console.

"Five-seven-one, this is Hood. What've you got?"

"We've got Lance Hoelscher stopped at our roadblock. Dispatch said you got the girl back safe. What do you want us to do?"

"What's he drivin'?"

"Eighty-two Ford pickup with a camper shell. It's registered to him. We checked."

"You checked his license?"

"Yeah. It expired almost a month ago."

Hood smiled. "Anything in the cab or the bed—a canvas bag, walkie-talkie, lantern or flashlight, a typewriter, a length of rope, duct tape, strips of cloth . . . anything like that?" He waited expectantly.

"Nothin' visible in the cab. The bed's got a camper shell with mirrored glass. We can't see much in there." He paused. "Want us to toss the truck?"

"No," Hood shot back, emphatically. "There's no probable cause." He pondered a moment. "I'll send more deputies and a wrecker. I want Hoelscher brought in on the expired operator's license, but I want him cuffed and I want two people with him. I want one deputy in the wrecker and another following in a cruiser. I want the truck impounded, and I want it in the garage. You got that?"

"Yes, sir," the deputy said.

Hood snapped the microphone back into its console, turned, and nearly bumped into Wally. "You hear all that?" Hood asked.

Wally nodded.

"Okay. Get with dispatch and get it done," Hood said. "And

when they get in, I want a twenty-four hour guard on Hoelscher and the truck."

"Gotcha," Wally said.

**H**ood walked briskly through the department, foregoing his customary "good mornings" to the dispatcher, secretaries, and deputies.

He had slept poorly. After interviewing Hoelscher the previous evening, Hood was confident he had the right man. What he lacked was evidence. Hood would have preferred to work through the night, but judges and lab technicians didn't share his sentiments. He was able, however, to exact a promise that the lab would expedite its work and to arrange an early morning appointment with Judge Payne.

"Sheriff," Wally called out, intercepting Hood as he neared the door to his office.

"Sheriff," a secretary interrupted, "I've got Sandra from the crime lab on line two."

"Anything urgent?" Hood asked Wally.

The chief deputy shook his head.

"I'll take it in my office," Hood told the secretary. He hurried through the doorway, collapsed into his chair, and punched the lighted button on his telephone.

"Hood," he said abruptly.

"And good morning to you," Sandra said, "after I came in two hours early to start on your evidence."

"Sorry," Hood apologized. "What have you got?"

"Not much," she replied. "The only prints on the envelope and letter match those of your Mr. Albert and the bank employee who brought it to him. The envelope and paper are both low quality—the kind you can buy at any discount store. Both were typed on an IBM Selectric II. They're as common as cottonwood trees, and the type is on a removable ball rather than keys. If your kidnapper is smart, he would have typed the letter, thrown the ball in the river and replaced it with another."

"Great," Hood said, his disappointment apparent.

"One other thing," Sandra continued. "The Selectric uses a cartridge instead of a ribbon. If you can find the cartridge, we can show that it was used to type the letter." She paused. "Of course, if your kidnapper is smart, he would have thought of that, too, and trashed the cartridge."

The sheriff noticed Wally fidgeting in the open doorway. "Anything else?" he asked Sandra.

"That's all I've got so far."

"Okay," he said, "thanks." Hood replaced the receiver and began gathering his files, re-

ports, and notes on Hoelscher. Without looking up, he asked Wally: "What's up?"

"The assistant public defender is here to see Hoelscher."

"Farragut?" Hood asked.

"Yeah. Is it okay?"

"Of course it's okay," Hood retorted.

"Just checking," Wally said.

"Sorry," Hood said. "I've got an appointment with Payne to see if I can get a search warrant for the truck, and I don't want to be late."

"What time?" Wally asked.

"Eight," Hood said.

"Better hurry," Wally observed.

Hood tucked the documents under his arm and brushed past him.

"Oh, by the way," Wally said, trailing behind him, "we traced the jonboat to a guy named Harley Mason. He spent last night drinkin' beer and watchin' the Cardinal game with a bunch of cronies at the Overlook Inn. He didn't even know his boat had been stolen."

The sheriff slowed but didn't stop. "His alibi check?" he asked.

"Airtight," Wally replied. "Oh, one more thing, we had a bit of a scare this morning. Meghan Albert got sick overnight—fever, headache. Her parents thought she might have been drugged or poisoned by the kidnapper, so they rushed her over to County General."

Hood stopped and turned, his expression betraying his concern. "She all right?"

Wally assured him she was fine. But she had chicken pox.

"Lord," Hood said. He glanced back at the clock. "I'm late."

**J**udge Everett Payne loomed large as he rose from his chair, leaned across his desk, and firmly shook the sheriff's hand.

Payne was dressed in the customary white shirt, striped necktie, and cardigan sweater he wore in his office; in his courtroom, he observed the tradition of wearing judicial robes. His jowly face was as lined as a metropolitan map, and his bald pate was flanked, above his ears, by identical shocks of curly, silver hair. Payne had earned a reputation as a knowledgeable and impartial jurist. On the bench, his imperviousness to embarrassment and intimidation bordered on arrogance—he left no doubt his courtroom was a kingdom he ruled with absolute dominion.

"So," Hood said, after explaining the circumstances surrounding Hoelscher's arrest, "what are my chances of getting a search warrant?"

"None, based on what you've told me," Payne said. "You've got no probable cause. You've got absolutely nothing that links Hoelscher to the kidnapping."

"The girl said she was lying on a carpeted floor, not a car seat. Hoelscher has a pickup truck with a camper shell," Hood reiterated.

"So," the judge said. "My brother-in-law has a pickup truck with a camper shell. It doesn't make him a kidnapper."

"Did your brother-in-law do time for unlawful detainment?" Hood asked.

"That's irrelevant and you know it," Payne told him.

Hood glanced around the room, surveyed the shelves bearing the neatly matched sets of law books, then looked back at the judge. "I know in my bones this guy is good for it. My bones tell me there's a bag with a hundred thousand dollars in small bills and maybe a typewriter used to type the ransom note in that truck."

Payne leaned back in his chair. "Your bones don't constitute evidence. Your bones don't give you probable cause. If you search that truck, whatever you find is going to be subject to a defense attorney's motion to suppress. There isn't a judge in this state who wouldn't be forced to grant that motion."

Hood exhaled a long breath. "So what you're saying is I may have material evidence sitting in the basement and I can't look at it."

Payne folded his wrinkled hands on his desk. "What I'm

saying is you bring me something substantial and I'll give you your warrant. Until then, my advice is don't peek or you'll blow whatever case you've got and probably find yourself on the receiving end of a lawsuit for violating his civil rights."

Wally watched Hood stalk through the department and into his office. He waited a few moments, then poked his head into the doorway. "You didn't get it, huh?"

"Not only didn't I get it," Hood said, "I got a lecture about how I might get sued by a suspect."

"Anything I can do?" Wally asked.

Hood waved him off, then, as an afterthought, called him back.

"I just want you to know I appreciate all your help," Hood said. "You've put in a lot of hours. I'm just in a mood today."

"I understand," Wally said. "I want to get him, too."

Again he disappeared. Hood stared at the closed file folder containing the documents and records on Hoelscher. He opened it and began leafing through the pages. His gaze froze on the prison record. An idea took shape in his mind as he scrutinized the categories and their respective boxes — some checked, others blank.

"Wally," he shouted.

Almost immediately, his chief deputy appeared.

"What time is Hoelscher's court appearance?"

"Nine," Wally said. "We've got four inmates. Two appearances on misdemeanors — including Hoelscher—and two arraignments on felonies."

Hood glanced past Wally at the clock—eight fifty-one.

"Call Judge Payne and tell him I need a minute before he goes on the bench. Tell him I'm on my way."

“What you're asking is highly irregular,” the judge said.

"Standard punishment for an expired operator's license is a twenty-five dollar fine, court costs, and verification within five days that the license has been renewed."

"But you could sentence him to jail time, right?" Hood said, as much a request as a question.

"If he pleads guilty," Payne affirmed.

"He'll plead guilty," Hood assured the judge. "He just wants to pay his fine and bolt. He knows once he's loose, I'll never get him back again."

"How much time do you need?"

"Three weeks."

"Three weeks," Payne said.

"I showed you his records, I explained how I think I can establish probable cause," the sheriff said, betraying frustration. "It may not take three weeks, but I need that long to be certain." He paused. "Your honor, he's a prior offender. He did eighteen months on a three-year sentence for unlawful detainment."

"And successfully completed parole," Payne added.

"Your honor, a little girl spent three days..."

"I don't want this man bounced around a jail cell," Payne interrupted. "If he gets so much as a hangnail while in your custody, you'll be standing before my bench. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Hood said.

Hood locked the cell door behind Hoelscher, stepped back and stared at his prisoner.

"I don't know what your game is, sheriff, and I don't know what you cooked up with the judge to get me slapped with a thirty-day sentence," Hoelscher said, "but you got nothin' on me."

Hood studied him for a moment. "You're mistaken," he said. "What I've got now is time."

"My lawyer'll make a motion to withdraw the plea. I'll be out of here in no time."

"I don't know about that," Hood said. "The judge may want

the motion in writing; he may want to take it under advisement." He paused. "But don't worry. You'll get credit for any time served."

Hoelscher stared at his captor. "What is it you want from me, sheriff?"

"Three weeks," Hood said, without hesitation.

Hoelscher's expression betrayed confusion.

"You know, it's ironic," Hood continued. "Usually, I hate waiting, but I'm looking forward to this. It may not be a sure thing, but my bones tell me pretty soon I'll have exactly what I need."

**T**hirteen days into Hoelscher's incarceration, Hood's bones proved reliable.

It started with weariness and a fever, followed by massive headaches. The county's attending physician was called and Hoelscher was given medication for the headaches. When his fever broke, tiny pustules began erupting on Hoelscher's scalp, forehead, nose, cheeks, neck, torso, back, arms, and legs.

"Adults always seem to get a heavy dose of these," the physician told Hood. "It's not so bad for kids, but—for adults—chicken pox really can be hell."

Hood laid the papers on the



judge's desk and stepped back as Payne reviewed them. One—the results of Hoelscher's physical examination on the date he entered prison — included a comprehensive medical history. The boxes marked measles and mumps were checked; the box marked chicken pox was blank. The other documents were statements from Meghan Albert's doctor and from the county physician who diagnosed Hoelscher at the jail. Both attested their patients had chicken pox. The report from the county physician included a statement about the incubation period of fourteen to twenty-one days, concluding that it was possible for Hoelscher to have contracted the contagious disease from the girl.

Payne looked up after reading the documents. "You realize this doesn't constitute proof," the judge said. "He could have gotten the disease from anyone."

"I'm not trying to establish proof," Hood said. "I'm trying to establish probable cause."

"For your search warrant?" Payne added.

The sheriff nodded.

Payne smiled, then issued the warrant.

In the camper shell of Hoelscher's pickup truck, deputies found numerous items but nothing linking him to the kidnapping. Wedged into the springs of the cab's bench seat, however, they found a bag containing a hundred thousand dollars in small bills. Albert, who had recorded the serial numbers of some of the larger bills, identified the ransom.

Hood was seated at his desk the following afternoon when Wally appeared in the open doorway.

"I'm not feeling very well, sheriff," Wally announced. "Mind if I go home early?"

"What's wrong?" Hood asked.

"I'm just a little tired. Got a headache."

Hood rubbed a hand over his close-cropped hair and frowned. "You've had chicken pox, haven't you?"

"Never did, sheriff," Wally replied. He pondered a moment. "You don't think . . ."

"Nah," Hood replied. "Probably all the long hours. Go home and get some rest. You've earned it."

FICTION

# The Potentate

by Jas. R. Petrin



**A**nother body, all right. So he was just going to have to call the damn police again.

Not immediately, though. He first had to trudge back up to the house and fall into a chair in the kitchen and drink down a large gulp of the gin that was always in the bottle that was always on the shelf. This was to make his nerves stop trying to jump out through his skin and run away on him. And then, at the last moment, when he was *almost* ready to pick up the phone, a sudden urge made him snatch his hand away and start in cleaning Peety's cage, just to give his heart a chance to slow down and steady out, and give that hollow feeling under his ribs, like someone had sunk a post hole there, a chance to fill itself up again.

Peety the macaw said, *Watch yer back!*

At last Cab Sigurdsson dialed the police station.

The long, bored tones of the sleepy fat constable answered. That made Cab so mad he almost hung up, but instead he said:

"You got to get over here now, with your siren, and don't stop, I got a body again, rich this time, a potentate, waitin'."

Silence; keen police brain at the other end of the line; disciple of Sherlock. There was a labored inhalation, then:

Illustration by James Watts

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"Mr. Sigurdsson, is it?"

"You know it, stop talkin', start drivin'. It's a hot day, an' a damp day, an' I dunno how long the damn thing's been layin' out there, starin' up through that glass, an' I don't have room in my fridge for it, not unless I toss out my winter preserves—" he meant his stock of tonic water "—an' I'm sure as shootin' not about to go an' do *that*. So it's up to you. You're the cop. Get off your backside. Hump on over here. Drive!"

"Ah," said the sleepy fat constable. "In the woodshed, is it—this one?"

"I said so, didn't I? An' my bicycle's still missing all the way from last Tuesday, you didn't find that yet, did you? Look, gimme that rotten Sergeant Gowerluk. I'm not talkin' to you."

"Afraid you got to talk to me, Mr. Sigurdsson. The sergeant don't want to be disturbed."

"Disturbed?"

"He don't want to be bothered."

"Bothered? Bothered by a body? He don't, don't he? You just tell old satchel-seat I thought bodies was his business; bodies was his trade. I thought bodies was what he liked best, what he come whistlin' to work each morning for. Bothered! Hell! I got a leak, call the plumber, he's here plumberin' like a shot in ten seconds. Got a storm-broke TV antenna, there's a man on the roof like a cat, clamberin', before I put down the phone. But I get me a body somewheres, a dead one, your favorite thing, an' I can't drag a damn cop out of his air conditioning with hooks. I wish to heck I could deal with that Chief Robideau, even if he is a bum, in the town here. I wish there was some other police. I wish to heck I could take my business down the road."

"You know there can't be more than one police department in a jurisdiction, Mr. Sigurdsson. And you aren't in End of Main, you're rural, so you got to deal with us. It's the system."

"Don't I know it. Damn socialists. Bunch of commies."

The sleepy fat constable gave a grunt, then a wheeze, then a curious high-pitched squeal that sounded, if such a thing were possible, like a great quantity of Jell-O giggling, then the squeal broke down into gasps, then great hacking coughs, and Cab heard the clunk of the phone being dropped while the constable went roaring around the room for awhile.

In about a minute the racket subsided, and picking up the phone once more, the constable was calm. Nattering away again as if he hadn't almost self-destructed.

"I doubt any other police would handle your complaints any different than what we have, Mr. Sigurdsson. We responded promptly to your previous calls, didn't we? What's this now—the third body you've called about in—let's see . . ." There was the brisk sound of official pages turning, crisp little crackles of insolence. "The last four days?"

"Hah! So that's it! You want I should save 'em up for you. Tote 'em in once a week liké Coke bottles. An' not even collect no deposit."

"Furthermore, I don't think you should badmouth the sergeant. He's gone out of his way lots of times to be a help to you—"

"Don't want no help."

"Said it was just a week or two ago he lent you a hand there in town with a large clinking package that was slipping off your bicycle carrier . . ."

"Damn cargo shifted."

"All that gin, Mr. Sigurdsson . . ."

"Never mind my gin! I didn't steal it. An' I'd drink aquavit if the government didn't tax it out of reach on purpose. An' don't preach! Not you. If I had the scotch your dad drank himself to death with, I could float a boat in it. The *Titanic*!"

"The *Titanic* sank."

"So did he!"

The constable held his breath for a moment or two, as if he were finally having to count up to ten to rein in his temper, and that made Cab feel smug, knowing he'd hit a tender spot. Finally the constable said in a voice that was wrung out and strained:

"No need for you to talk to me like that, Mr. Sigurdsson. No need to go on blaming the sergeant and me for what happened up at Hecla, you and those other folks getting forced off the island so the government could make a golf course and a park. That wasn't our idea. And besides, you got paid off. And you had that place of your uncle's there at End of Main to settle in. You came out of it all right. No need to go on putting your teeth into people. Okay?"

It was hard to take this blather from an overweight cop.

"No, it ain't okay. Think we gave a damn about the money? That was our home. A quiet place. Fishing village. Church. Road on a cliff. Lighthouse. Until you damn potentates come an' marched us Icelanders off at gunpoint. Think we'll forget that? Think I will?"

"Nobody marched you at gunpoint."

"You would have!"

"Drop it!" the fat constable snapped. "It's over with, Mr. Sig-

urdsson! Done! Forget it! Start living again!"

Cab fumed. He wanted to slam his phone down hard, ride all the way up to the district detachment on his bicycle, give the constable five or nine stiff-wristed slaps each side of his fat head, pedal home, and only *then*, if he still felt like it, carry on with the conversation. "An' I'd do it, too, if I still had a bicycle," he mumbled.

"What's that, Mr. Sigurdsson?"

"I said, some cops you are, you an' that sergeant. Always get your man—what a laugh! Can't get no man at all. Can't even get a dead man."

"We do our best—"

"Your best! Hah! You oughta be a cop in Mexico, or Buenos Aires—you wouldn't last a day. Dead bodies for their cops every three minutes. Bodies in their waitin' rooms, their in-baskets, filin' cabinets, all over the place. People shovin' bodies in under the doors an' through the windows. Shippin' 'em air express. Trucks pullin' up piled high with 'em. You wouldn't last a day, an' neither would that barrel-butt sergeant of yours, an' you can tell him I said so!"

This time Cab really did slam down the phone. And splashed himself out another stiff slug of gin—no tonic.

"There's the police for you, Peety," he breathed to the macaw around the fire of it.

Peety said, *Bunch a bums—don't trust 'em!*

"Know why they treat us this way, don't you! Ignorin' us? Same reason they run us off the island. They think we don't count, think we're nobody. Hell, they'd be beggin' us for bodies if we was rich—some potentates down in the city, or somethin'."

Potentate was Cab's word for the week. Taken from his favorite public access television program, *Vocabulary—Make Your Words into Bullets*. Cab believed in that. He'd been making words into bullets and shooting them at people ever since he'd left Hecla Island, closed and locked the door of the house his grandfather built and got into the taxi for the ride to the mainland across the causeway that the government had built for the golfers. He hadn't set foot in a taxi since.

It was the government had done it. Made him mean, the damn potentates. And the cops were no better.

"Police all over the world just dyin' for bodies, an' we got to be stuck with those bums. Like it's our fault bodies get up an' ride bikes away before the police arrive. Hell, it's the police's fault, when you think of it—they should get here quicker." He took an-

other drink. "Prob'ly knew that'd happen. Drove here slow, *hopin'* it'd happen." A sudden thought struck him; an uneasy thought. "Peety, you think maybe I ought to just get back on down there an' make sure this dead potentate of ours has stayed put?"

*Get goin'! Stay put! Watch yer back!*

"Can't have no more bodies shamblin' around . . ."

*Don't trust 'em . . .*

"Be just like in that movie *Night of the Livin' Dead*. Bodies all over the place, stiff as brooms, shovin' at the door . . ."

*Stay put . . .*

"Organizin' a union next . . ."

*Get goin' . . .*

"Demandin' things . . . Bicycles . . ."

He cast about for his hat—a peaked trucker's cap with a Gordon's Gin logo on the crown—finally realized he was still wearing it, and went out the front door and through the sunporch and down the crumbling red brick path towards the woodshed, grumbling into the breeze.

"They think I'm that boy what cried wolf," he grumbled aloud. "Think I'm a mean old drunk. Think I'm playin' some sort of mean old drunk's game or somethin'."

He kicked a stone off the path and sent a bluejay squawking.

"Can't trust 'em."

He knew he was talking to himself, and doing it more and more all the time. But nobody else would talk to him. And living well past the edge of town with forty acres of nobody else on every side allowed him the privilege of talking to himself. That was his view of it. Allowed him to talk to trees, bushes, birds, rocks, bugs, clouds, sky, wind, any damn thing he felt like talking to. A chipmunk dogged his steps, begging for peanuts, and Cab snapped, "Take a hike, dead bodies again."

Near the end of the path, a new concern seized him. He was hoping very intently that the body he was absolutely sure he had seen in the woodshed—*almost* absolutely sure—actually was still there. "Should of planked a rock on it." That he was *hoping* for a body appalled him. "Gah! What's happenin' to me? It's that government, that police. Them potentates. They done it. Turned me into one a them ghouls, one a them fiends, that's what they done. One a them geeks." This last complaint he addressed to the axe handle sticking up from the chopping block as he tramped on past the woodpile.

There was a rise in the path before it plunged down steeply to



meet the woodshed, which was why he was able to stop at the top of it and stare splang down through the window glass and see the legs.

Cab stopped, stooped, stared. And saw them again.

Sure enough.

Legs.

Still there.

"Good," he said, before he could stop himself. A stab of guilt passed through him, and a peculiar feeling in his own legs took him so suddenly behind the knees that to keep from falling over he had to glance away and concentrate on Stephanson's old abandoned grain elevator across the field, which rose weathered and dull out of a seablue ocean of flax like a tall grey rock some storm-blown farmer had wrecked himself on. One had, too; Arni Stephanson had been Cab's great-uncle.

Cab took a deep breath, bit his lower lip hard, forced himself to turn back to the woodshed window and look again.

They weren't your ordinary-type legs, denim-trousered and cotton-socked with toes tucked into dirty gym shoes like the ones he had seen on the last body with the maker's label showing in fluorescent pink—NIKE AIR. Cab had whispered with satisfaction, "No more air for you."

There were no gym shoes on these legs. These legs were something else again. They were giftwrapped. Sheathed in powder-grey slacks that were carefully creased, dark silky-looking socks that hugged the ankles, and shoes that looked so much like imitation alligator they could only be *real* alligator. Rich man's legs. Politician's legs. Potentate's legs.

"Jackpot," Cab said.

So he actually had himself a body. For certain this time. For true and for real and for sure. Problem now was to make those stupid cops believe that he had one. And just how was he going to do that? He screwed up his face and pondered the problem.

Since the police wouldn't come, he had to get somebody else out here, some sort of independent witness. Let *them* have a look, shove *them* back into their car, or their truck, or whatever they rode in on, make *them* roar off quick down the road and fetch that hammock-hipped sergeant back here in a headlock. Clout that sleepy fat constable under the eye and hustle the both of them on out here, strapped to the fender of the car if that's what it took.

"Problem is, looks like I'm goin' to need—" and he took a swallow of dry air, the word was so hard to say. He squeezed it out: "Help."

Better get on the phone right now. Do it from the woodshed, there was an extension there, save him a hike back up to the house. But, no, that was no good. His directory, his list of names and numbers, was in the drawer next to the kitchen sink. He needed that list. He'd got out of the habit of phoning people the last few years, and any numbers he might once have remembered had flitted out of his mind long since like birds in search of a warmer climate.

Might be a problem even with that directory, getting someone out here: not too many someones he was still on amicable terms with. Not many he hadn't winged with an armor-piercing word or two. Not many he hadn't wounded.

Best to try someone from a long time ago.

Like maybe Helga Grimson . . .

Funny how his mind always turned to Helga Grimson. They could have had something once, Cab and Helga Grimson, a long time ago during the good years on the island, before the exile. Met at a dance. Had he insulted her lately? He didn't think so. He'd hardly spoken to her since they'd both wound up here at End of Main and she'd taken up with that rotten Griffiths. He'd gone on thinking about her, though. Cab grunted. They could have had something once, him and Helga, something good, if only the damn awful potentates hadn't come along and let their social mechanics loose, with their legal wrenches and their writs.

He hurried on back to the house.

Could be Helga wasn't even in. He counted the rings—six, seven, eight, nine of them, and just as Cab Sigurdsson was about to hang up reluctantly and try for somebody else, Helga picked up the phone.

"Helga, guess who, it's the Dancing Machine," said Cab Sigurdsson, coming right to the point.

Dead quiet on the line. Cab prompted:

"Remember that Legion dance all them years ago? An' I slipped you the aquavit? An' you fell down and dragged the punchbowl off the table? An' after that I scraped the fruit out of your blouse? Now it's your turn to help me."

"Cab? Cab Sigurdsson? That you?"

"'Course it's me. Didn't I say so? You gone deaf, Helga? Now shut up an stop yakkin' an' pull your support hose on an' get over here. I need you. I got dead bodies walkin' an' dead bodies sleepin' an' dead bodies bicyclin' all over the damn place. It's like rush hour

at a graveyard an' no one to help direct traffic." He paused a minute, then hollered down the line, "Hey! Helga! You there?"

"I'm here."

"Good. For a minute I figured maybe you'd keeled over an' turned into a dead body too. Figured maybe I'd lean out the door an' see your fat, blotchy legs stickin' outta my rhubarb leaves. So get over here, Helga. It's awful, you can't think how awful it is. Bodies. First one I saw was in the pickle patch, just pulled back the leaves to make a cucumber san'wich, an' there he was, flat as a mat, grubby little paws planked over his belly like a sleepin' Buddha. Eyes tight shut. Like he wanted to turn into a cucumber himself. Kinda green, too, though that could of been the leaves—'member that one time I held dandelion under your chin, or was it two on account of your chin was so big?—back when we was kids, to turn your face gold?"

"Blotchy, fat, chin big?" said Helga Grimson.

"Second body—now there was a treat. Could of served that one up on a plate. Out behind the woodshed, that one, splang in the thick of the blueberry bush with his face in the dirt an' his trousers down. Well, you don't wanna see no sight like *that*, no warnin', on a empty stomach." Cab stopped, drew a breath, continued: "An' finally, today, another one, stretched out in the woodshed this time, *my* woodshed, like he owns the damn place, like one a them Pooh Bahs, you know, like one a them potentates owns half the world?"

"Fat . . ." said Helga Grimson.

"An' the shoes on it! Worth the trip alone. Fred Astaire'd kill for 'em. Two shoes, a right an' a left, toes up. An' a grin like a alderman—I wanted to chase him with a stick an' a kick. I mean, he might of bought up the Empire State Buildin' an' the Eiffel Tower an' Buckin'ham Palace for all I know—the queen don't tell *me* nothin'—but he didn't buy up my woodshed! I never signed no paper to *that* effect, I'd of remembered it, wouldn't I? But there he is, anyways. Like a landlord." He paused and listened. "Still there, Helga?"

"Legs . . ." said Helga Grimson, in a voice that was tiny and weak and strangled. What the heck had gotten into her?

"That's right. Just his legs showin', this last one. Toes in the air. But at least his pants is up, thanks for small favors. So, come on. Before he dances away in those shoes. Get on over here, Helga. Right now!" As an afterthought he added: "An' bring a gun if you got one."

But Helga Grimson had hung up the phone.

Cab looked at the phone in his own hand, then at Peety.

"Oh, well, I never thought that much of her anyway. All them blotches. That chin. An' with a gun, too. Prob'ly shoot *me*. Who's next?"

Still, he did feel a bit let down as he fanned open the book. The next name was that of his next door neighbor, Joe Garson.

"A bum, Peety. But he's handy."

Joe answered with a grunt. Joe was in his cups. Cab could picture him sprawled at his door-sized kitchen table with his white rum and Coke, insecticides laid down for the bugs' lunch, herbicides misted over broadleafed weeds, fertilizers spread, waiting for rain. He seemed to find it hilarious that Cab Sigurdsson had called him up for the first time ever.

"Hoo! Haw! You want *me* to come right over? Good one, Cab! It's a gag, right? Hoo! Haw!"

Cab explained.

"What? Dead bodies walkin' around? Hoo hoo haw! An' it ain't even Halloween. Best thing is to whack 'em with a shovel, Cab. Right across the eyes. Put your back into it. Won't kill 'em if they're already dead, but it'll lay 'em down with one hell of a headache. They'll stay down then, I bet. Hoo! Haw!"

Cab said he needed a witness.

"*You need me?* Hoo hoo hoo! Haw haw haw! You never need nobody, that's what you always say. Witness a body? Haw! Witness it yourself. Haw! Or make it sign somethin'. Like a death certificate. Hoo hoo hoo! Haw haw haw!"

Seething, Cab hung up the phone.

Then he thought of Gunther Schause, his neighbor on the other side. He dialed the number.

Gunther Schause was sorry he couldn't come and be a witness. But he did have a medical opinion:

"When there's bodies walkin' around, it's head work you need, Cab. What you call your lowbottomly or somethin'. Starts at the top an' works on down. Dave Sumka got one. See, they got this here chair. They clamp you in. Then this here saw comes down, circlin'—you know, like one a them kind what cuts doorknob holes. Sharp. Takes the center top of your head away, clean, like a jack-o'-lantern. Keeps turnin'. Down through the brain, all them visions, cleans 'em right out. Keeps cuttin'. Down, down. Through all them poisons. Down. Gets to your liver, what's left of it, taps in a sand point, pumps out that gin. Keeps goin'. Turnin' and' cuttin'. Down, down . . ."

Cab hung up on him too.

He thumbed his list.

Here was a name: Sheila Watson-Coker. Ran the vegetable business down past Lockport with that little rabbit-faced husband of hers. Probably ate half the carrots himself. And all the lettuce. And hadn't Cab told the both of them as much, one time?

Turn the page.

Dane. Cecily Dane. He'd never badmouthed her.

But just a minute.

What about those kids at the K-Mart in Westbrook? Ones in the next aisle, yipping and yapping? He could still hear their snippy voices. Twenty questions. It only needed a second to figure out they were talking about *him*, Cab Sigurdsson.

What was his favorite state?—Vir-*gin*-ia. Game?—*gin* rummy. Food?—*gin*-gerbread. Well, there was only so much of that a hot-blooded person could stand, and Cab had stood it, and four ounces more, so he'd primed his wordgun, leaned over the magazine rack to give the brats a strafing—short, controlled bursts. Except the kids had gone. Wandered away. And who *was* there? Cecily Dane. And so Cab had let fly at Cecily instead. Gave her a blasting. Drove her penciled eyebrows an inch higher up on her face and trembled the blue plastic curlers in that rat's nest she called her hair.

Turn the page.

In a minute or two he had thumbed through every page in the directory book, studied every name, and was closing it back up again. Snapping the covers shut on a lifetime of acquaintances, relatives, friends. All those folks and not a soul to come help him out of a jam. Not a soul he hadn't let fly at, one time or another, with words like rock salt shot out of a gun.

"Hell with 'em," he said to Peety. "Who needs 'em."

*Watch yer back!*

He picked the handset up, idly stared at it, wondering if there weren't still somebody in this town or the next who might help him out, somebody not listed in the book, somebody he had forgotten about.

Still wondering, he put the handset to his ear.

His eyebrows flicked up. Then they flicked down. Then his mouth formed a little O. Then it made a worried frown.

There was no dial tone.

Just an eerily haunting emptiness, as if every other phone in the world had gone off-hook at the same time, everyone listening to Cab Sigurdsson with a hand pressed over their mouthpiece. He

clamped his mouth tight shut, breathed through his nose, and listened harder. He heard what might have been a grunt, then, more distinctly, a crisp, electric click. He hung up and lifted the receiver again, and this time the dial tone was back, purring gently in his ear.

He put the phone down again and stared at it.

"What do you suppose would make a phone go an' do that?"

*Watch yer back, Peety said.*

This was no longer an innocent kitchen telephone you could use to dial and call up and hear a friendly voice say, "Got trouble, Cab? I'll be right over." It hadn't been for years. Now it was even worse. A two-ended contraption with its other end situated . . . where?

*Stick it in yer ear, Peety said.*

There was one possible explanation: Someone had been listening in on him from the woodshed extension and had stayed on the line after he had hung up. He looked at Peety and a cold uneasiness moved inside him, as if a cool, wet rag had suddenly settled around his heart.

"Somethin' tells me I better get on back to that woodshed an' have a look at that potentate one more time."

**T**here was something very wrong at the woodshed yard. Something not quite right. But he couldn't quite put his finger on it. He gazed around at the stacked, split poplar, at the woodchip carpet, at the chopping block, but couldn't figure out what it was.

He shook his head and walked to the brow of the slope and peered down once again through the woodshed window.

This time the scene seemed to leap right out at him. A scene glimpsed through a spyglass, striking him full in the face and falling away again into insignificance as if it were suddenly nothing at all.

Which is exactly what he saw there.

Nothing.

Nothing at all.

No alligator shoes, silk socks, pressed pants, and certainly no legs. No body, no potentate. Not even a hint of one.

He cursed and slapped his leg. Another body gone. Another body reared up on its hind legs and gone off on him. His very newest one. Gone like both the others. He felt anger heaving up behind his eyes, a sense of frustration and defeat. What was happening to him? Were the fat constable's insinuations right? Was he imag-



ining things? Hallucinating? Going over the edge? Was this what happened to crusty, live-alone bachelors who set their backs against life and chased the world away with harsh words?

His potentate, gone.

He wanted to yell. But he didn't. He wanted to dance all around the wood yard in a rage till the dust boiled up, but he didn't do that, either. What he did was close his eyes and scrunch them tight and hold them that way until the salt tide of anger began to subside.

One thing was sure: if there *had* been a body there, it ought to have left behind some sign of itself. He knew that much from watching Inspector Morse on Prairie Public Television. He'd been careless about the other bodies, hadn't really studied them. And then those two stupid policemen had arrived, and not seen anything, and hadn't expected to see anything, and just tramped all around and up and down, mucking up any clues that might have proved Cab was right.

That wasn't going to happen this time.

This time Cab was going to conduct a very careful inspection of the scene himself.

"Wish that damn Helga was here," he mumbled, and then bit his tongue, surprised at himself. He didn't need anybody.

He went on down the slope to the woodshed door.

Conduct an inspection. Find something. A bloodstain, a bent twig. A twist of fabric, a button, hair, fingernail, eyelash, thread, teardrop, *anything*. Find it and then those damn police would owe him an apology. A written apology. And he'd frame it, and waterproof it, and fix it to a post at the end of his drive so that every cop and potentate who came down the road would remember how right Cab was, and how wrong they were, and he'd write it into his will how that sign had to stay there for fifty years, or a hundred years, or—

He arrived at the stoop of the woodshed.

Poked open the door.

Looked inside.

And saw that he hadn't lost his newest body after all. It was still there. A body in creased gray slacks and alligator shoes. Only now it wasn't lying down. It was a standing-upright type of body. A breathing-through-its-nose type of body. A squat thick-necked body in a white ruffled shirt and black bow tie, that turned and blinked and looked at him.

A potentate.

And he knew now what had been wrong about the woodshed

yard: there had been no axe in the chopping block. The explanation for that was now clear. It was because the body had the axe in its hands.

The face that stared back at Cab was pallid, as if it really was the face of a corpse. Its eyes were cold and glassy, like something found in a jar—pickled eggs with irises stuck on. Cab thought he recognized the face from somewhere. He watched a dozen emotions flicker one after another across the heavy, dark, crafty features.

"Why ain't you dead?" Cab demanded.

"So the four of us, we lay up here," the body said. He was affable for a criminal. And welcoming. He had reached out his hand and conducted Cab into the woodshed like a gracious host receiving a friend. He had built a nest under the workbench out of cardboard and burlap bags; he must have been sleeping there when Cab glimpsed him through the window. He eased the door shut with one gleaming alligator shoe, settled himself like a lord in the sanctuary of his mañor, and smiled. The axe drooped lazily. The blade of it hung downward like a tooth ready to bite. "What are you staring at?" he asked.

Cab said, "I know that I know you, but I dunno from where I know you."

The linen shoulders shrugged. "Everybody knows me." Then he went on with his story: "We never meant to stop here at all. Meant to be safe up north till the row over the robbery cooled down. Then we got car trouble. We spotted this old outbuilding and decided to hole up here awhile."

"Trespass, you mean."

"Rest, till we could borrow another car."

"Steal one, you mean."

The pallid cheeks darkened. The smile twisted into a grimace. "I said borrow. We wouldn't have kept it. We left the first one, didn't we, in the river? But we hunted all around here—" he drew a circle in the air with his hand "—and we couldn't find a car."

"Ain't got one," Cab Sigurdsson said.

"All we found was a bike. I mean, all I found was a bike. And I hid that."

"Stole it," Cab said.

"I hid it because three men can't fit on one bike, can they?" He said this earnestly, as if it were a conclusion he truly wanted a second opinion on. "And I thought, a man on a bike, a man with

money, can vanish easily. Pedal away. Disappear. So I came back here to the shed to get my pack. But then . . ." His glassy eyes seemed to swell in their sockets. "Can you guess what happened?"

Cab shrugged. "How should I know? They knew about the bike an' yelled at you. So you killed 'em. Now listen, mister, where do I know you from?"

The man made a dismissive gesture. "I don't know. The TV, I guess. Everybody knows me. No one likes me, though." He tilted his head. "You don't think much of me, either, do you?"

"Think a lot of you. Think you're a liar, thief, cheat, killer . . . That's lots. Think you're mean, too." Cab pointed at the potentate's shoes. "Bet you killed that alligator yourself. Bit it to death."

"I'm an important man—"

"I knew it. A potentate."

The potentate moved his head from side to side, thoughtfully, in long, careful arcs, the glassy eyes brooding as if their owner was about to lose all patience. Then, with an effort, he swallowed his annoyance; his Adam's apple went up and then down.

"They ganged up on me, that's what happened. And it wasn't right. Dipping into the casino money, that was my idea in the first place. My plan." He glanced down proudly at his fine, dusty clothes. "I was the inside man." Then anger contorted his face. He twisted the axe as if it were a partner's neck. "Do you think either of *them* could have managed it? Worked out how to take a proper share of the money, the *big* money, the *really big* money for once, and not just settle for the little winnings they gave to us? Answer? Answer is *no!*"

His face had grown flushed, his breath came in quick little gasps. The knuckles of the hand that gripped the axe were white as bone.

"After finding the bike, I hid it, then I come up on the woodshed from behind. I heard them in here grumbling. Talking down about something. So I put my ear to the wall. Do you want to know what they were saying?"

"No."

"They were saying things about *me*. Nasty things. How I was a bad partner. How I couldn't be trusted." A private fury pulled his lips tight across his teeth, and his eyes were small and fierce. "*Saying they'd be better off once they finally got rid of ME!*"

He whacked the head of the axe into the dirt floor in a rage, then yanked it out again, scattering pebbles.

"So I started thinking a little bit more about that bike—"

"My bike."

"—and it seemed to me that a man on his own would have more of a chance if there weren't two big mouths left behind to yap about him. It seemed to me that if one man with money could get away slick, one man with *more* money could get away even slicker. That's when I decided to deal with them. Get them alone somehow, one at a time—"

"Lie to 'em."

"Take back the shares they didn't deserve—"

"Rob 'em."

"And put them out of the way."

"Murder 'em."

The potentate's scowl deepened again. His voice heated up.

"Look! You'd better not keep going on about me like that. I only took what was mine. The whole thing was my idea, my plan. It was them that turned against me, and that made all of the money mine."

"Lied to 'em, robbed 'em," Cab said, "an' murdered 'em."

*"It wasn't like that!"*

"Sneaked, trespassed, lied, robbed, murdered, an' left dead bodies lying all over the place for a old man who never had a bad word for nobody to come along an' trip over." Cab glared at the potentate reprovingly. "What if I'd hurt myself?"

"I had to leave them somewhere, didn't I, while I got their out-of-the-way places all dug and ready? Do you think that was easy? You try digging a couple of deep holes all by yourself. I didn't mean for anybody to go tripping over them, but it took a bit of time for me to get them comfortably under the ground."

He shook his head as if he still couldn't comprehend his betrayal.

"After all I did for them. Doesn't that prove how you can't trust people? How you're better off to keep to yourself, to do things all on your own? Well . . . what do you think?"

"I think," Cab said evenly, no more able to stop himself than an egg rolling over a ledge, "that what you did was prove those two pals of yours right. They was thieves. But you're everything I just said you was an' you're a sneak on top of it, too. An' you're prob'ly a whole lot of other rotten things I can't guess at and don't want to 'cause it'd prob'ly just make me heave up and make my hair fall out an' turn my face green. You're a weasel."

Cab threw the potentate a look meant to make him feel even smaller and squatter and meaner than he was. Then he turned and marched across the room.

"Hey!" the potentate barked, the axe bobbing up.

Cab continued walking to the wall of the shed, stopped there, and took down a spade that hung from a hook. He walked back to the potentate and held it out to him, handle first.

"You're leavin'. An' them travelin' bodies is leavin' with you. I don't want 'em, they got no manners. An' they ain't my bodies. They're your bodies. No good to me, couple of bodies. Even the police don't want 'em. So go back to wherever you buried 'em, dig 'em up, load 'em on that bike you stole, an' pedal 'em away. Find some other place for 'em."

"I can't do that."

"'Course you can. You're rich. Buy yourself a graveyard."

The potentate glared at Cab for a long while as if he were trying, like the fat constable, to determine whether or not he was dealing with a madman or just a man who was trying to make a fool of him. Then he said:

"Friend, you've been here on the farm too long. Dead bodies on a bike! I might have pedaled myself away once, but now I've got another problem, don't I? In fact, it's the same problem I had before. A bicycle is slow. I could be overtaken easily. Especially if somebody here were to tell the police to be on the lookout for me."

Cab glanced up, surprised.

"Huh! You mean me?"

"Of course I mean you."

Cab snorted. "You eavesdropped on my line. You know them police won't listen to me."

"They might get second thoughts . . ."

"Hah! Them two don't even get first thoughts."

"Still . . ." the potentate said. And he glanced down at the axe, fondled it, then looked deep into Cab's eyes.

He took a threatening step towards Cab.

And Cab ground his teeth and took a threatening step towards him.

"I'm tellin' you, Mr. Potentate, go dig up your damn bodies an' clear out of here."

Something mean and small and nasty moved behind the potentate's face, turning it uglier than it already was. The exasperation that had been smoldering there seemed ready now to burst into real fire. He gripped the axe tighter and stretched his lips back so far Cab could see the brown of the tartar line under his gums.

"Now, listen—"

"You need your teeth cleaned," Cab told him.

The potentate exploded:

"Don't you realize who you're talking to? *Don't you know I'm a dangerous man? I DON'T WANT THOSE BODIES!*"

Cab exploded right back at him.

*"AN' I DON'T WANT 'EM EITHER!"*

For a moment there was nothing between them but electricity, a field of fury between two forceful, galvanized minds. A crackling blue bolt could have joined them.

Then the potentate struck Cab Sigurdsson.

With a blow from the butt of the axe handle, he sent Cab's thin body sprawling in a heap against the wall. Cab tasted the salty, sweet taste of blood on his tongue, heard a roaring in his ears, felt harsh pain blossoming under one eye. He saw the potentate standing over him, watched the axe whirl out suddenly to send a stack of neatly piled kindling clattering to the floor.

And for the first time in years Cab Sigurdsson's defiance collapsed and fell in. Like a fish that has bloated itself into a monster to intimidate the world, his combativeness imploded as if it had been jabbed with a pin. Here was danger, real danger, and he knew it. And this was fear. Not uneasiness, not anxiety, freezing terror.

Cab sucked in his breath and thought, he hit me, he hurt me, my face, my teeth, oh my mouth my big mouth, now he's goin' to axe me, chop me, cut me, kill me, oh somebody please help me, save me, deliver me now, now, *now!* And he pressed himself tight against the wall behind him, so tight he could feel the dry rot of it, the papery wooden wafers of it giving way under his nails. He dug his fingers into the wood and felt it crumble like thick bits of pastry.

The potentate lifted the axe again.

In a last desperate act Cab suddenly bent forward, straightened his old legs, hurled himself back into the rotting wood of the wall—and felt himself bursting right on through it. And at that moment he was glad he was skinny, glad he was tough, glad he was all those things he'd never even thought about before, and as he tumbled out into the sunshine in a rain of dust and splinters and heard the howl that went up behind him, like the cry of a cheated animal, he knew that he had just escaped death. He rolled up onto his feet.

And he ran.

Keep off the path, his instincts told him; and he did that. He crossed the path at an angle and plunged into the undergrowth, while behind he heard the clumping of the potentate's alligator shoes stumbling back through the woods to the door, the light,

cushioned, padding sound of them as the potentate came running around the side of the shed with the axe to give Cab a hit.

Cab ran even faster.

All about him the treetops, the bushes, the leafy ground were silent. His little companions, the creatures he'd befriended in his rough way over the years, had fled or hidden themselves. Now Cab knew what it was to be one of them. To be hunted, without friend or ally, fleeing for his life. And he didn't like it.

A few quick strides brought him to the edge of the copse where his property ended like the battered shore of Hecla Island and the gentle blue-green lake of Garson's flax began. Five hundred yards away, the weathered pinnacle of his great-uncle's failed elevator rose out of that lake with ancient slumped gray shoulders.

Cab heard the potentate calling to him up and down the path. He rushed on, into the lake.

Cab knew a thing or two about elevators. Especially this one. He had played inside it often as a boy when visiting with his parents. In those days, though he could scarcely comprehend it now, it had been a treat to escape from the island, to make the mainland crossing on the old groaning ferry—there had been no golfers' causeway then—and travel by bus down past the beaches to the edge of the marsh country. This cobwebbed, slope-sided cellar in which he now huddled was called the dump pit. Long before Cab was born, wagons loaded with grain had queued up after harvest to climb the outside ramp to the room above and disgorge their golden burdens through the grating over his head. The grain was then carried to the top of the elevator by a rubber and canvas conveyor fitted with scoops, and diverted into one of the sixty-foot storage bins with a steerable metal spout that Cab's father called a gerber.

But all that was long ago. Before the eviction and the hatred.

Long swishing strides in the flax outside. A shadow falling across the weathered hole in the wall Cab had clambered through. A head and shoulders shutting out the light.

"Hey!" called a voice.

Cab hugged his knees.

"I know you're in there," said the voice. How cultured it seemed, honeyed and smooth, like the voices of the men who had come to the island with their close-shaven faces and their government papers. "I followed you through all this blue grassy stuff. Doesn't it look like water? You left a wake like a boat."



Cab hadn't noticed. He kept his arms wrapped tightly round his knees and dug his fingers into his arms. There was nowhere to hide. A light winked on. A cat's eye in the dark. One of those pocket-size flashlights. Keychain type. Of course a sneak and a thief and a liar and a killer would be toting one of those! Its beam groped in the dark, found Cab, settled on him.

"Well! There you are," called the potentate. "I see you. Come on out."

The beam was like a physical thing. Cab felt trapped by it. An insect transfixed by a pin.

The probing beam bobbed forward. A long shadow moved like a spider. There was a scraping sound. A grunt. The potentate was following Cab down into the dump pit. Once through the rotting vent hole, he had only to slide down the slope of the pit and he'd be right on top of Cab.

With his axe.

"Yah! Get away!"

Cab leaped for the dangling conveyor, scrambled up it as he'd done as a child, making ladder rungs of the scoops. The potentate followed fast, dropping into the pit behind like a furry insect. Cab heaved himself upwards, climbed through the hole above, and stepped out onto the gritty wooden floor of the receiving room. The flashlight below sent its tiny beam through the dump-grill in the floor to make shifting yellow bars that licked Cab's legs. The conveyor belt groaned as it took his pursuer's weight. The light bobbed. Shadows danced crazily.

*Hide, you damn crotchety old fool! Hide fast, quick, now!*

A feeble grayish light struggled through the mat of cobwebs and grime that clogged the window. Enough for Cab to see and remember a childhood hiding place, a sort of closet for the tiny bins where the grain samples had been kept. He wrenched the door open. One glance showed him he could scarcely conceal himself in that closet now. *You overgrown old dragon!*

The potentate was not used to physical effort; he was grunting from his exertions in the floor. Cab cast about desperately, seeking some other escape. There was a crack in the wall where the daylight stabbed through, and he pressed his mouth against it and cried, "Help!" at the blue lake of flax.

He turned back to the conveyor, saw a dark shape framed by the flashlight heaving up out of the floor. "Get stuck!" Cab ordered. "Get stuck for a hundred years till the ceilin' falls in an' kills you!"

"Nobody likes me," the potentate lamented.

Then Cab caught sight of a ladder in the corner, which he remembered now in a rush, and he ran to it and swarmed up its square rungs like a sailor. He climbed fast, knowing he was in an access chimney between the bins, moving up, up, up. The potentate's light was soon a tiny patch beneath his feet a mile below.

Don't look down, you darned old grouchy thing, he told himself; and in spite of it watched in horror as the torchlight began inching up after him.

"Come down!" the potentate shouted. "I won't hurt you. You won't feel a thing. Trust me!"

Higher.

Suddenly the ladder gave a gargantuan moan, shivering under the combined weight of the two men. Cab knew it ought to take their weight easily. Probably that damned scrounging Garson had been stealing the bolts from it. God, how Cab wished he was back in his cozy house with a cool gin and tonic, learning his word for the week and teaching Peety how to hate. Oh God, oh God, oh God!

His pursuer came on relentlessly. They were nearing the top of the bins. A patch of summer sun fell in through a damaged roof vent, and Cab caught a glimpse of blue sky. Suddenly aware of the height he had reached, his knees went rubbery and he nearly let go the rungs. Hang on! One more step and there would be a platform, if Garson hadn't stolen it. Still here! He stepped onto the catwalk above the gaping black mouths of the bins.

His arms arched from the climb; his lungs labored for breath. Even after all this time, the air was still sweet with grain. Pipes angled down from the gerber above like octopus arms. Cab scurried to the end of the catwalk as the potentate clambered out of the ladder well, crouched on the catwalk, aiming his light. He was a powerful man despite his poor conditioning: Cab saw that he still had the axe in his hand.

This is it, Cab thought. I'm goin' to die.

Behind Cab most of the catwalk was missing, only a few feet of it remained. For him to withdraw any farther meant retreat along a twelve inch timber that stretched above the yawning black bins, a sixty foot fall to sudden death.

Cab stepped out onto the beam.

*It's him or me. Fight or flee. But there ain't no place to flee, an' all I got is words.*

The potentate was staring at Cab fixedly, his strange, lifeless eyes flat as the sheen of old glass. When he spoke, his voice sounded small, lost in the gulf below them.

"Come on. We can be friends."

"Take a hike," Cab told him.

"Up here? Look, you know I can't let you report on me. That's just logical, isn't it? So do us both a favor and take a giant step to your left. Or to your right—I'm not fussy. It's got to be that way, you can see that, can't you? So come on. Be nice. Don't make me come out to you. I might fall. Break a—*leg!*"

He gave a feint towards Cab as he bellowed the last word. Cab took an involuntarily step backward, his heel bumped a protruding spike, and he nearly did make that sideways leap into space. With his heart climbing up out of his chest and into his throat, he managed to regain his balance. He edged even farther out onto the beam.

"Whoah!" said the potentate. "Nearly did it that time. I don't want to fall down *there!*" He shone his small torch down into the bins. Its light could not penetrate the gloom. "Mind you, if a man fell from here he'd probably pass out from the wind before he hit bottom. Wouldn't feel a thing. Want to try? No? Froze up? Guess I'll just have to come there and unfreeze you then."

He eased forward. There was a snap of dry timber.

"Yow!" the potentate yelled cheerfully. "Don't make 'em like they used to—good thing, too." He took another step.

Cab opened his mouth wide and shouted, "*Help!*" at the heat and the darkness and the dust. He could not tear his gaze from the burning white bulb of the tiny torch. It was like a light in a tunnel which would soon become a train, bear down on him and destroy him.

The wooden timber moved. Sagged a degree. Cab fought for balance. It moved again in a jarring lurch that made both men wave their arms around like two kids on a rickety fence.

Then a sunbeam lit up the pale face.

"Where do I know you from?" Cab asked.

The dull eyes never wavered.

"I was in politics—once."

"In politics? You was in politics? One a them potentates? One a them bums chased us all off the island?"

The potentate was in striking range now; he drew back the axe. "Enough talk. Time to cut this visit short."

"I'll cut you short!" Cab shrieked, and threw himself forward as the axe came down. The axe head swished past him, its handle glancing off his shoulder so that he had to stop and do a dance on the beam to recover himself. The potentate lost his grip on the axe

and it went end over end into the void. Cab lunged forward and seized the potentate by the throat.

"Help!" yelled the potentate.

And then, incredibly, from a thousand miles below an answer drifted up to them:

"I hear you, Cab. I'm comin'!"

The two men stared at one another. The potentate's eyes were bugging out. Then Cab whooped in exultation.

"Hey! Ho! Halp! Who's that down there?"

"It's Helga," called the voice from the depths. "Helga Grimson. You up there, Cab? I brang along the gun, just like you—"

*Pow!*

There was the thin, dull snap of a shot, and then an awful lot happened in a very short time.

A .22 gauge bullet left the barrel of Helga's varmint gun, climbed vertically, burnt the tip of Cab Sigurdsson's nose, continued on up through the peak of his Gordon's Gin cap without even knocking it off his head. Cab had no idea what had happened. Perhaps nothing. Perhaps he was shot through the brain. He stood teetering where he was, blinking. "I knew it. Damn woman. She's killed me. I'm dead." The potentate tore free of Cab's grasp, gave a scream, swayed, seemed to float in space for a while like a marionette hanging on the air, and finally, with a shriek, plummeted into the depths.

His tiny light fell with him. Cab stood gazing downward, watching the bulb dwindle and fade. There was a muted thud. Miraculously unbroken, diminished by distance, the little flashlight still glowed, throwing a backdrop of yellow light that revealed a confusion of scramble and broken and vaguely recognizable shapes.

"Bodies," Cab whispered. "My damn bodies!"

"You still up there, Cab?"

"You fool woman," Cab hollered. "You damned near shot me."

"Hate to admit it but they was right after all," Cab said, "them rotten police. Ain't no bodies on my land. Not now, anyways. That liar, that killer, that thief never buried 'em. Just dragged 'em out here by the heels an' booked 'em a basement suite in Uncle Arni's prairie highrise. An' now he's moved in with 'em."

They were walking back through the flax.

"You're wrong, you know," Helga said. "He wasn't one of the politicians chased us off our land. Only looks like one."

"What looks like a skunk, smells like a skunk, must be a skunk."

"Don't be like that," Helga said. "Say something nice."

"Nice? Something *nice*? Huh! Like what?"

"Well, for instance, how about 'thank you'?"

Cab made a face as if the very thought pained him, cleared his throat, then squeezed the words out:

"Okay. Okay. Thank you. *Thaaaaaank you!* An' your fat legs ain't blotchy."

Helga squeezed his arm.

"I looked around the house for you," she said, "before I heard you shouting out at the elevator. Hope you don't mind. It's awful messy. Maybe I could come over once in awhile and tidy up for you . . ."

Cab bristled. "I can—" And then he softened. "I can . . . go along with that. But what about that rotten Griffiths?"

"I got rid of him. He had . . . appetites."

"Hah!" said Cab. "Hum!"

"Yes. And I got another idea, too," Helga added. "Why don't you teach that bird of yours to say nice things for a change?"

"You teach it," Cab said. "I dunno no nice things."

"All right. I will. Maybe I'll teach you, too."

"Hell!" Cab said.

And they went together up to the house.

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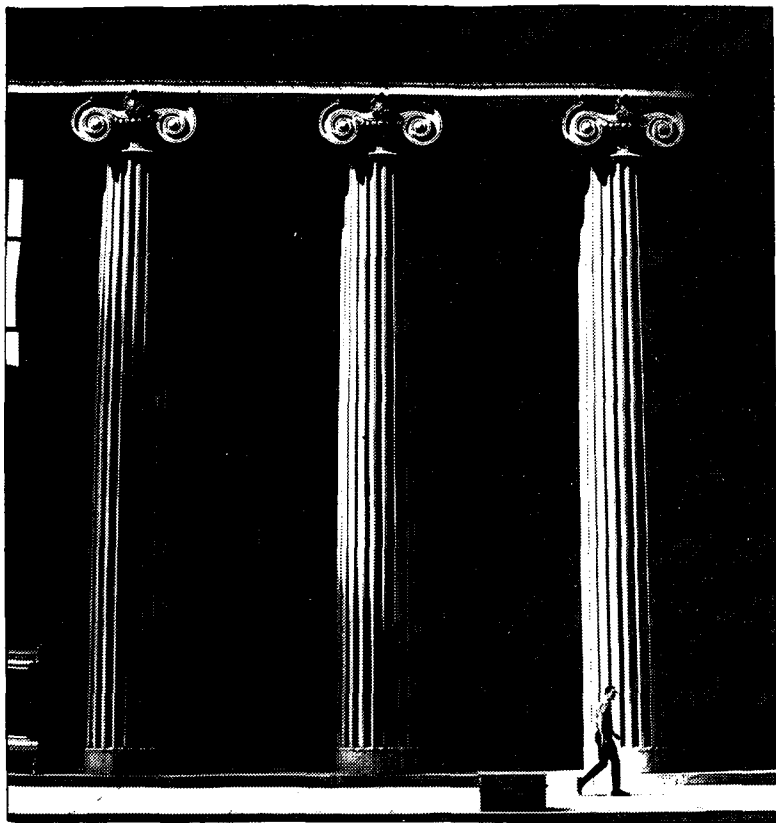
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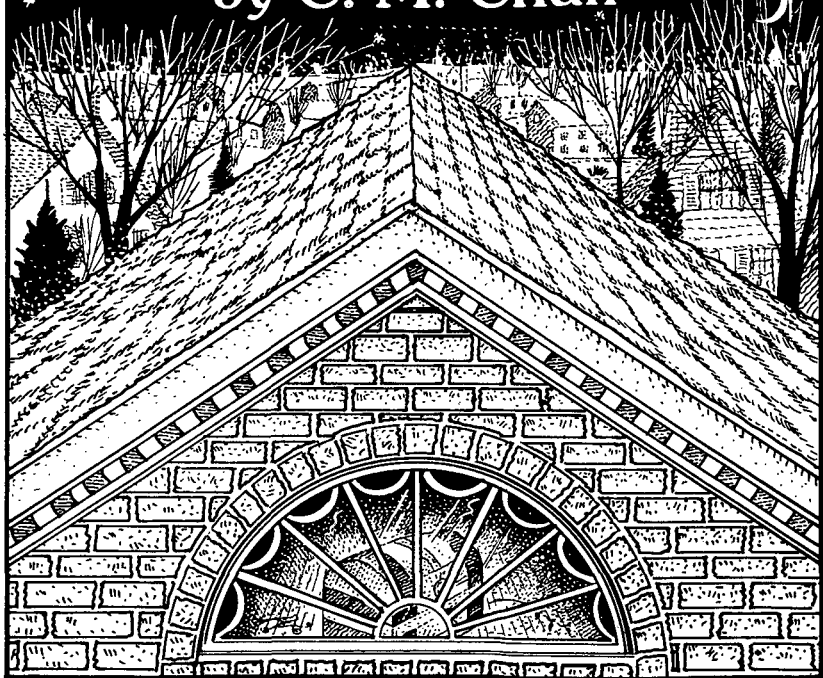
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The winning entry for the September Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 156.

FICTION

# —Murder— —at Christmas—

by C. M. Chan



**T**here were eight days till Christmas. That meant there were six days till Phillip Bethancourt would be called to gather round the family hearth and join in the exchanging of good cheer and discussions of the principle that,

although one might be independently wealthy, this did not eliminate the need for doing something useful with one's life and why couldn't he have become a barrister like his cousin Robert? Or head up a charity like his sister? If he was so in-

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terested in criminal investigation, why didn't he get a job with the CID? Bethancourt always smiled and said he wanted to be a writer, a notion that was just barely borne out by the publishing of three or four of his articles.

Eight days till Christmas also meant five days till he would be required to place before Marla, his girlfriend, a present both expensive and spectacular. This was only their second Christmas together, but Marla's attitude toward presents was clear to anyone who had known her a week, and Bethancourt knew better than to disappoint her.

Bethancourt, proceeding down Bond Street towards Asprey's, caught sight of a stocky figure in a tweed overcoat just crossing the street. This bore a strong resemblance to Detective Sergeant Jack Gibbons, a great friend of Bethancourt's and his chief source for the practicing of his amateur detective hobby. Bethancourt sprinted forward to catch him up at the corner.

"Phillip!" grinned Gibbons. "I was going to call you when I got back to the office."

"Christmas shopping, I see," said Bethancourt, eyeing the three bulging shopping bags in Gibbons' chapped red hand.

Gibbons made a face. "It may be the last chance I'll get," he said. "There's been a murder off in Dorset. I was sent back this

morning to get the postmortem and interview one or two people, but I thought I'd better get some Christmas shopping done while I was still in town."

Bethancourt's eyes brightened behind his glasses. "Were you going to call me just to say happy holidays, or is the murder particularly interesting?"

Gibbons laughed. "Well, it's an odd one, certainly." He shifted the packages in his hands. "There's an elderly widow, quite well off, living alone now in a huge Victorian monstrosity where she brought up five children."

"Sounds normal so far," observed Bethancourt. "Children, I take it, live in London or other equally faraway places."

"Yes, yes," said Gibbons. "I haven't come to the odd bit yet. It's the murder itself that's so bizarre."

"Well, who was murdered?"

"We don't know."

"You don't?"

"No. If you'd just be quiet for a bit, I could tell this in an orderly fashion."

"Very well."

"Mrs. Bainbridge got a Christmas tree in a couple of days ago and went up to the attic to bring down the ornaments. Well, she opens the attic door and a truly awful stench greets her. It's so dreadful, she's nearly sick on the spot—"

"Jack, you can't mean—"

"Oh, yes, I can. Her Christmas ornaments were scattered all over the place and in the old steamer trunk where she usually stores them, there was a dead man—several months gone, we think."

"My God," said Bethancourt, fascinated. "What a shock for the old girl."

"Oh, she didn't discover the body herself," said Gibbons. "The smell alarmed her enough so that she went back downstairs and called a neighbor. He and his wife came over, and he was the one who went up and opened the trunk—and he *was* sick. It was rather a pity that he'd just finished lunch," added Gibbons reflectively.

"You can't blame him," said Bethancourt with feeling. "It must have been perfectly foul."

"Oh, certainly," agreed Gibbons cheerfully. "Well, it's all quite a mystery at the moment. Mrs. Bainbridge hadn't been up in the attic since she put the ornaments away last Christmas, and she doesn't think anyone else has been, but the place has been simply overrun by children and grandchildren. Once we find out who the dead man was and when he was killed, it may all become a lot clearer."

"It's a lovely puzzle as it stands," said Bethancourt, an eager look in his eyes. "I say, Jack, you wouldn't want a lift

back to Dorset tomorrow or anything, would you?"

Gibbons laughed at him. "Well, I don't know if tomorrow will suit," he said slyly. "I've got to interview two grandchildren first, and if I don't find them in this afternoon—"

"You devil," said Bethancourt. "I will pay for the taxis and even carry one of your bags if you will let me come with you."

"And drive me to Dorset tomorrow?"

"Yes, damn you."

"Very well," said Gibbons, holding out a shopping bag. "I knew you'd find this one interesting, Phillip."

**T**he postmortem was waiting for Gibbons when they returned to New Scotland Yard to drop off the packages.

"Well," said Gibbons, frowning at it, "he apparently met his fate sometime in August, or possibly early September."

"Lord," said Bethancourt, pushing his glasses more firmly onto his nose and peering over Gibbons' shoulder. "You'd think the whole house would have smelt of it by now."

"The third story did a bit," said Gibbons. "But that's the old servants' quarters, and of course nobody goes up there nowadays. Mrs. Bainbridge's daily goes up to clean once a

year in the spring, but that's all."

"Stabbed, eh?"

"So they think, but you can see how vague they are. A stiletto or a whacking great kitchen knife: it could have been anything. There were bloodstains in the trunk, but the scene-of-the-crime men didn't find them anywhere else. So it's likely he was killed elsewhere."

"Well, of course. You don't lure people to attics to kill them."

"You could," said Gibbons. "I don't see why not. No, don't start, Phillip—we've got to get over to the university and find Mrs. Bainbridge's granddaughter."

Maureen Bainbridge, emerging from a chemistry class, was a truly lovely creature of about twenty. There was something kittenlike about her, how she held her head and brushed her dark hair aside, and it made a fascinating contrast to her open, straightforward manner. She was tall and slender, with the famous English peaches and cream complexion.

Even Bethancourt, who had a high standard of female beauty, gave a low whistle when the student they approached pointed her out. They extracted her from her classmates, introduced themselves and ex-

plained their presence, and then followed her to an empty classroom where they could talk.

"It's incredible, isn't it?" she said, sitting down on one of the desks. "I really can't quite believe it."

"I'm sure it's a shock," said Gibbons. "Can you tell us, please: when was the last time you were at your grandmother's house?"

"In the summer," she replied promptly. "We were all there during the Bank Holiday."

"All of you?"

"The whole family," she said expansively, and then hastily amended, "All my aunts and uncles, I mean. Only one of my cousins showed up. Oh, and Dad brought one of his business partner's sons. Grandmother was annoyed about that because it meant an extra bedroom, but there he was, you know."

Gibbons pulled a notebook from his pocket and consulted a page. "That would be Renaud Fibrier," he said.

"Yes," she nodded. "He was just a little older than me, so my cousin Daniel and I did our best to entertain him. But, of course, there were a lot of family demands, and I'm afraid Renaud must have gotten bored. He left Monday morning, at any rate, instead of staying on till Tuesday."

"He sounds a rather tedious

houseguest," said Gibbons.

"I didn't mean that," Maureen said. "Renaud was really rather charming. I only thought he must have been bored because he left early."

"I see," said Gibbons. "We haven't spoken with Mr. Fibrier yet; your grandmother didn't have his address."

"Neither do I," she replied promptly, "but Dad should know."

"Yes, we should be speaking to him soon," said Gibbons. He glanced down at his notebook again. "So the houseparty consisted of Paul and Clarissa North, Bill and Bernice Clayton, Michael and—"

"Oh, no," she interrupted. "Uncle Michael wasn't there; he lives in America. But Aunt Cathy was visiting from Australia. None of us had seen her in years, so there was a sort of family reunion. Most of them were only there for the weekend. My parents and I stayed for a week—we always do during the summer. Oh!" She put a hand to her mouth in what Bethancourt could not help but feel was a very becoming gesture.

"What is it?" asked Gibbons.

"I've just remembered. I was at Grandmother's house for a weekend in November. I was a bit behind here and I just wanted a quiet place to study and Grandmother said I was wel-

come. She always does."

"Did you go up to the attic or the third floor while you were there?" asked Gibbons.

"No. The last time I was in the attic was last year when I helped Grandmother with the Christmas things."

"Do you remember whether anyone else went up there during the August visit?"

Maureen wrinkled her brow thoughtfully. "I don't know," she said after a moment. "I don't remember anything like that, but there were so many people . . . it was awfully busy."

"That's understandable," said Gibbons. "Now, can you tell me when you were last at the house before the August visit?"

She paused again. "I think in April," she said at last. "There was the vacation and I went up then, I know. I don't think I was there again until August."

"You were alone with your grandmother in April?"

"Yes—no, Aunt Clarissa came up and spent a night, I think."

"Don't you have brothers or sisters?" asked Bethancourt. "Or did they not go to your grandmother's in August?"

She grinned at him. "I'm an only child," she said, "and the youngest of my cousins. Dad married late."

"Really?" said Bethancourt. "Did you know that only children are often very high achievers?"

"Great," she answered. "Maybe I'll win the Nobel prize someday, then. I'm studying physics."

"Well," said Gibbons, rising, "you've been very helpful, Miss Bainbridge. Here's my card; please call me if you think of anything else. Right now, we have an appointment to keep with Daniel North. I believe he was the cousin you mentioned who was also at the August reunion?"

"That's right. Say hello to him for me."

"We will," promised Bethancourt. Outside, he added, "Quite something, isn't she?"

"She's too young for you, Phillip."

"Much too young," Bethancourt agreed. "But I could always wait for her to grow up."

"Incorrigible," muttered Gibbons.

Daniel North was a good-looking man of about thirty, conservatively dressed as befitted a junior member of a prominent solicitor's office. He received them with a quick smile and asked them to be seated. He denied having been in his grandmother's attic since he was a child, and he had certainly not gone up there in August, which was the last time he had been at the house. Asked who else had been there at that time, his list tallied with Mau-

reen's, with one exception.

"I thought," said Gibbons, "that Maureen's father had brought a business associate?"

"Oh, him," said North. "I'd forgotten. Yes, he was there. I can't think why Uncle David brought him—I never cared for the fellow myself. Unsavory type, if you ask me. Anyway, if you want someone who's been in the attic recently, you should talk to my mother."

Gibbons looked up. "She's been up there?"

"I don't know," answered North, "but she often visits my grandmother—much more frequently than the rest of us. If anyone's been in the attic, it would be she. In fact, I think she's in Dorset now."

"Yes," said Gibbons. "The chief inspector was going to see her this morning. Well, thank you very much for your time, Mr. North."

North ushered them to the door, where the clerk appeared to escort them from the premises.

"Well," said Gibbons, shrugging into his coat in the vestibule, "that's done with."

"It hasn't got you much further."

"No one really thought it would. But you never can tell," added Gibbons cheerfully. "One of them might have been up there near the crucial times."

"Look here," said Bethan-

court, leading the way out into the street, "why don't you come round to dinner tonight and we can go over it?"

"Where are you dining?" asked Gibbons suspiciously. He had previously accepted dinner invitations from Bethancourt and found himself eating in restaurants that he could ill afford on his salary.

"I'm meeting Marla at eight thirty at Joe's Cafe," answered Bethancourt, confirming Gibbons' worst fears.

"Well, I don't know, Phillip—"

"Don't be a spoilsport, Jack. I'm sure there's heaps of things about this case you haven't told me yet."

Gibbons had an inspiration. "How would it be if I met you there for a drink before dinner?"

"If that's the best you can do, I suppose I'll have to be happy with it. Eight thirty, then, in the bar."

"We could make it earlier, so that when Marla comes—"

"She'll be late."

"So will you."

Bethancourt assumed a solemn expression. "I give you my word, Jack, tonight I shall be punctual."

"Oh, very well. Half eight then."

The bar at Joe's Cafe was crowded. Gibbons ordered a whisky and positioned himself

in view of the door. He did not bother to search for Bethancourt among the other patrons, having less than no faith in his friend's promise to be on time.

He was pleasantly surprised, therefore, when Bethancourt made his way through the door at eight thirty-five, beaming triumphantly.

"I told you I'd be here," he said happily. "Here, let's move down a bit. We can just fit in over there. Now then, Jack," said Bethancourt, having obtained a drink and wedged himself firmly between Gibbons and a rather large man in evening dress, "let's start from the beginning."

"And what do you mean by the beginning?"

"The murdered man, of course," replied Bethancourt promptly.

"You saw the p.m.," said Gibbons, shrugging and sipping his drink.

"Yes. A man of about thirty, stabbed in the back sometime in August or early September and considerably decomposed. But what was he wearing? Was he dark or light?"

"Dark hair," answered Gibbons. "Open-necked shirt and linen pants and black loafers. And if that tells you anything—"

"It tells me he wasn't chopping wood when he was killed," retorted Bethancourt.

"Yes, but what we really need to know is who he was. And that will have to wait until we've finished comparing his description with the missing persons list. Until we find out who knew him, and where he might have been, we're working in a void. He might have been killed anywhere, anytime, by anybody, and put into the attic anytime subsequently."

"He didn't belong to the village, I suppose?"

"No. That was the first thing we checked. None of the villagers in the immediate area is missing anyone. But one of the villagers, or else one of Mrs. Bainbridge's family, must be the murderer."

"Because, you mean, of knowing Mrs. Bainbridge's habits. You don't suspect her?"

Gibbons shrugged. "She's a very elderly woman. She hasn't been to the top of the house in a year because it's hard for her to climb the stairs. I really can't imagine her carting a man's body up three flights."

"No, I suppose not."

There was a slight disturbance in the bar. The various conversations paused momentarily as people's attentions were caught. In a moment the cause of this became evident as several gentlemen shifted their position to allow a spectacularly beautiful woman to pass through. She walked down the

aisle they made for her as if it were her right, head crowned with copper hair held high, jade green eyes passing them over until she found the one for whom she searched. And then she smiled, and her slender figure moved quickly forward.

"Marla!" said Bethancourt, glancing hastily at his watch. "It's not even nine o'clock yet."

"You said half eight," she reminded him, kissing him lightly. "Hello, Jack. Phillip didn't tell me you were joining us."

"I'm not really," denied Gibbons hastily. "Just a drink."

"Come now," said Bethancourt firmly. "You simply can't refuse to join us. Now that Marla's come, we can get a table and be comfortable. I'll just speak to the maitre d'."

And he moved off while Gibbons was explaining that he really couldn't.

"Why not?" asked Marla, smiling. "Have another date?"

"No," said Gibbons uncomfortably. "It's just that, well, I did all my Christmas shopping today and I'm feeling a little low on funds."

"That is not a good excuse," said Marla firmly. "Besides, I expect Phillip will pay."

"I expect so, but I don't like him to."

"That's just one of those male things," replied Marla, hunting in her bag for a cigarette. "If you were a woman, you wouldn't



mind at all." Gibbons was spared from answering by the return of Bethancourt, who herded them without further ado towards the dining room. He sighed resignedly.

When they had put the menus aside and had ordered the wine, Bethancourt said casually, "I'll have to get up early tomorrow, Marla. I told Jack I'd drive him back to Dorset."

"Dorset?" asked Marla. "Whatever are you doing out there? I thought your people lived in Suffolk?"

"They do," answered Gibbons. "I'm working in Dorset."

"Oh, God," said Marla. "Not another murder investigation." She glared accusingly at Bethancourt.

Marla did not like her boyfriend's hobby. She found murders an unpleasant and unhealthy topic and, moreover, felt that investigating them took an inordinate amount of time and thought. Time and thought which could far more pleasantly be devoted to herself.

"Well, yes," admitted Bethancourt. "But it's only a little one, Marla, and will probably be cleared up by the time we get there."

"Hmpf," said Marla, or something very much like it.

"Actually," went on Bethancourt, unperturbed, "it's a rather unusual case."

"Is it?" she asked frostily.

"Yes," said Bethancourt firmly. "There's this old woman, you see, a widow—"

"Excuse me," said Marla, rising. "I have to go to the w.c."

This was a tactical error on her part. By the time she returned, Bethancourt and Gibbons were deep in a discussion of Mrs. Bainbridge's progeny and the possibility of their having visited the attic.

"Chris O'Leary is interviewing the ones in Northants," Gibbons was saying. "That's Bill and Bernice Clayton."

"Bernice is Mrs. Bainbridge's second daughter?" asked Bethancourt.

"That's right. Clarissa North, Daniel's mother, is the eldest. Next is Bernice Clayton, and after her is Maureen's father, David. There's another son living in America who hasn't been to England in some time, and then the youngest is Cathy Dresler, who now lives in Australia and was the cause of the August reunion."

"I suppose none of them is missing?"

"No. No, I'm afraid not."

Bethancourt filled Marla's wine glass, lit her cigarette, and considered.

"And has Mrs. Bainbridge had any visitors other than her children and grandchildren?"

"She says not."

"What on earth does it matter whether she has or not?"

asked Marla impatiently.

"Because, my love, the murdered man was a stranger to the village. Either one of Mrs. Bainbridge's family ran into him unexpectedly in August, when most of them were there, killed him, and hid him in the attic, or else they killed him somewhere else, at some other time, and transported the body to Dorset, thinking that the best hiding place. Incidentally, Jack, it would be interesting to find out which of Mrs. Bainbridge's relatives visited her by car."

"It sounds very farfetched to me," said Marla.

"True," agreed Bethancourt. "Which is why it is more likely to be one of the villagers. One of them either has a visitor or goes to meet the victim. In a moment of passion, he kills him. He's left with the body, all in a panic, when suddenly he remembers Mrs. Bainbridge, all alone in a huge house and slightly deaf. It's late at night and he knows she doesn't lock her doors. So he pushes the body along and carries it up to the attic."

"Lovely," said Gibbons dryly, "but Mrs. Bainbridge is *not* slightly deaf. And how do you know he was killed late at night?"

"This theory," went on Bethancourt, unheeding, "also explains why the body was never

moved. One of the family would most likely not desire their mother or grandmother to discover a rotting corpse in her attic. Moreover, they will naturally fall under some suspicion, as they are connected with the house. Whereas one of the villagers has no real connection to the house and may be less considerate of Mrs. Bainbridge's feelings."

"It's possible," allowed Gibbons. "But it is also very possible that Cathy Dresler is the murderess and did not have the opportunity to retrieve the body before she had to leave for Australia."

"Anything's possible," said Marla. "It's quite possible that Phillip killed this man himself, just to give himself something foolproof to investigate."

"Now, Marla—"

"Here come the starters," she said sweetly. "Shall I stay and eat them with you, or go elsewhere?"

"Sorry, darling," said Bethancourt. "Jack and I will keep off murder while we're eating."

"Of course," agreed Gibbons hastily, knowing Marla to be perfectly capable of dumping the starters over their heads if they did not desist. "Not an appropriate dinner topic in any case."

This rule was adhered to during the rest of the meal, for which Bethancourt insisted on

paying. Gibbons excused himself soon afterward, saying he still had his notes to put in order before returning to Dorset the next day.

"All right," said Bethancourt. "I'll see you in the morning, then."

"Nine o'clock, don't forget," said Gibbons.

"I won't. Goodnight, Jack."

"Goodnight," chimed in Marla, and, just to show there were no hard feelings, kissed his cheek.

Chief Inspector Wallace Carmichael made his way down the stairs from his room and stood in the doorway, surveying the clientele of the Lion's Head pub in Dorset. He was a tall, ruddy-faced man with bristling brown mustaches and sharp blue eyes. He glanced at his watch, swore vehemently under his breath, and marched to a corner table from which he could keep the door in view. Where the hell was Gibbons, anyway? He had rung up last night to say he would be back this morning and here it was, wanting only a few minutes to twelve, and no Gibbons. Carmichael felt himself to be a lenient man with his subordinates; he gave them every opportunity to follow up their own leads and express their opinions. After all, he wasn't going to be at the Yard

forever, and there were the chief inspectors of tomorrow to think of. But he didn't think much of sleeping in when there was a job to be done, and young Gibbons was going to get a piece of his mind on the subject. If he ever showed up.

Carmichael had procured himself a pint of bitter and a ploughman's lunch and was just sitting down to it when Gibbons entered, closely followed by a tall, slender young man with fair hair, horn-rimmed glasses, and a large Russian wolfhound. Carmichael heaved a great sigh.

"I have only one thing to say," he pronounced when Gibbons reached the table. "I am always pleased to have Bethancourt here give us any help he likes, but he is not a member of the force, he therefore cannot be disciplined by us, and if he can't get up in the morning, *do not*, in future, accept rides with him."

"I really am most awfully sorry, chief inspector," said Bethancourt while Gibbons murmured, "Yes, sir," and glared at his friend.

Carmichael held up a hand. "No more to be said. Just bear it in mind next time. Now, get yourselves some food and drink and make a report."

"I'll get everything," offered Bethancourt. "You sit down, Jack, and don't waste any more time."

Gibbons shot him another glare, sat down, and began digging in his briefcase for the postmortem report.

Carmichael looked it over and listened to Gibbons' recitation of the two interviews he had conducted. Bethancourt, having procured the viands, sat silent and alert, giving his best impression of the good school-boy.

"Nothing yet on his clothes or from missing persons?" asked Carmichael when Gibbons was gone.

"No, sir. Not yet."

"Well, there's been a development or two here." Carmichael sipped his beer and wiped his mustache carefully. "I've spoken to Mrs. Dresler in Australia. She says she was in the attic sometime at the beginning of her visit here. She can't pin it down exactly, but it was certainly prior to the Bank Holiday weekend. Nothing was out of place when she was there—at any rate, the Christmas ornaments were not scattered about."

"Does Mrs. Bainbridge corroborate her statement?"

Carmichael shrugged. "She's not sure. Mrs. Dresler says she was looking for an old book of her father's. A first edition of Dickens it was. Mrs. Bainbridge remembers her daughter asking after it and later finding it. She herself was under the impression the book

was still in the library, although she admits that she did pack up some of her husband's books at one time, and moved some others to different parts of the house. There is a box of books in the attic, so Mrs. Dresler's story may be quite true."

"What about fingerprints?"

"The attic's filled with them. The Australian police are taking a copy of Mrs. Dresler's and sending them along." Carmichael pulled a cigar from his breast pocket and lit it carefully.

"O'Leary's rung up from Northants," he went on, puffing, "but he hasn't got much more than you, Gibbons. In fact, we've got just about the whole family covered, but no one's been in the attic in donkey's years, or so they claim."

"Who haven't we talked to, sir?"

"David Bainbridge—he's on business over in France and his wife doesn't know when he'll be returning. He was called there rather unexpectedly, I gather. And we haven't talked to Renaud Fibrier."

"That was David Bainbridge's business partner?" asked Bethancourt.

"Actually, his partner's son. I haven't really made much of an attempt to get hold of him yet—it seems unlikely he would have gone to the attic unless he accompanied one of the others.

In any case, it may be a bit of a job finding him, since we don't know whether he lives here or in France. Mrs. Bainbridge—David's wife, not the old lady—says she was under the impression that he was living in England in August but had no idea if that was a permanent or temporary situation."

"Probably Mr. Bainbridge will know, when he gets back," said Gibbons.

"That's what I've been counting on." Carmichael drained the last of his pint. "Well, if you're finished, boys, we best get on with it. There's a whole village out there that may know something. I assume you're coming with us, Bethancourt?"

"Actually, I think I'd better beg off," said that young man. "Since you two are occupying the only two rooms this pub has to offer, I have to find someplace to stay. And somewhere to leave Cerberus." He indicated the dog at his feet. "But I'll catch you up later, if I may."

"Certainly, certainly," answered Carmichael heartily. He was a broadminded man, and even if Bethancourt's father had not been thick as thieves with the chief commissioner of New Scotland Yard, well, he had to say Bethancourt had never gotten in the way yet. And he could be very helpful when he chose, although Carmichael couldn't help thinking

that if Phillip was so interested in detection, he should get himself a proper job doing it.

Bethancourt, once they had gone, moved over to the bar and ordered another pint. Cerberus came and lay patiently at his feet. From his overcoat pocket, he produced a book entitled *Where to Stay in England*, and began leafing through the Dorset section.

"Sorry I can't put you up," said the publican, noticing this.

"That's all right," replied Bethancourt amiably. "If you've only got two guest rooms, well, there it is."

"That's a fact, sir. Or should I say inspector?"

"No, no," said Bethancourt, sampling his beer. "I'm not a policeman."

"Oh," said the publican, taken aback. "Excuse me, sir, but I saw you with the chief inspector and the sergeant there, and I just assumed. . . ."

"I'm just a friend," explained Bethancourt. "I sometimes push round and give the police a hand, if I'm wanted. My name's Bethancourt."

"Sam Heathcote, at your service, Mr. Bethancourt."

The two men shook hands.

"Perhaps you could help me," said Bethancourt, referring to his book. "Do you happen to know a Mrs. Tyzack?"

Heathcote chuckled. "There's not many folk I don't know

hereabouts. Mrs. Tyzack's place is just outside the village, on the same road as Mrs. Bainbridge, and she'll do you proud. Nice rooms she has, and a good cook into the bargain. If you don't mind a bit of chat, her place is as good as they come."

"A bit of a talker, is she?"

"Lor', sir. To be frank, she'd talk the hind leg off a donkey. But she's a good sort—don't misunderstand me."

"Lived here long?"

"Ever since she was married. She started the bed and breakfast after old Tyzack passed on. Just between you and me, he left her decently provided for—she just likes the company."

"I see," said Bethancourt. "Just one more thing—what about the dog?" He indicated Cerberus, who had apparently fallen asleep.

"That's a fine animal, sir. Well, Mrs. Tyzack has a dog of her own—a Yorkshire terrier, he is. If you think your dog wouldn't mind that. . . ."

"Oh, Cerberus is a friendly sort," Bethancourt assured him. "So long as the terrier is friendly, too, there shouldn't be a problem. Perhaps I might use your phone to see if Mrs. Tyzack has a room free?"

"You can take it from me she does. There's not much call for that sort of thing at this time of year. She's doesn't have a guest in the place."

"Well then," said Bethancourt, finishing his beer, "I'll just pop round and fix it up with her. Thank you very much, Mr. Heathcote."

Mrs. Tyzack was a short, plump woman of sixty who was delighted to give Bethancourt a room and thought Cerberus a lovely dog. This opinion was given after Cerberus had put down his nose to sniff at the terrier doubtfully, and then proceeded to ignore him. The terrier, puzzled by this attitude, butted him playfully; Cerberus looked round dispassionately, carefully moved his hindquarters out of the terrier's reach, and then turned back with the air of having settled something. This did not deter the terrier, however, and the performance was repeated several times on the way upstairs.

"This is the nicest room," said Mrs. Tyzack, opening a door. "Looks down on the garden, as you can see, and, being on the corner of the house, it has an extra window. Makes it ever so airy, I always think. Oh, yes, thank you, I did do it up myself, although I had someone in to help with the wallpaper. I'm glad you like it. There's the bathroom just down the hall on the right—it's the second door down, you can't miss it. And your towels are here, as you can

see. There's no one else in the house at the moment, so you can leave them in the bathroom if you'd rather. Well, I suppose I'd best let you get settled. Would you like some tea or anything?"

"That would be lovely," said Bethancourt. "I'll be down in a few minutes."

"Take your time," she replied cheerfully. "Oh, and when you do come down, Mr. Bethancourt, would you sign the register for me? I always like to have a little record of the people who visit. It's fun to look through and see where they all come from."

Bethancourt promised to sign the register, and with that she left him.

He was not very long in following her down, and the tea had not yet appeared in the sitting room. He went back to the entrance hall and found the register spread open on a little table. He wrote his name and address beneath a signature dated in late November, and then turned back the pages to the August entries. These were plentiful; apparently Mrs. Tyzack did brisk business during the summer months. Unfortunately, it was impossible to tell who had been traveling alone and who had not, since everyone except the married couples signed their names on a separate line. Still, if Carmichael

was looking for strangers to the village, here was a large list of them. Bethancourt wondered if Mrs. Tyzack had seen all of them leave, luggage in hand.

"There you are, Mr. Bethancourt. I've got the tea all set up now."

"I'm just coming, Mrs. Tyzack."

"You've been signing the book, I see," she went on, leading the way back to the sitting room.

"Yes. You haven't had anybody in lately."

"No, it's not the season for it, you see. People mostly come in the summer—by the end of October we're down to a trickle. And it's *very* unusual to get anyone this close to Christmas." She looked at him curiously.

"I'm here to work with the police," supplied Bethancourt.

"Oh, about poor Mrs. Bainbridge's body," said Mrs. Tyzack with eager interest. She seated herself and began to pour out the tea. "Wasn't it just awful? Who would have left it there for the poor woman to find I just can't imagine. People have no consideration for the elderly these days at all."

"I suppose you know her quite well?"

"Oh, yes. The family was living here when I married George. Louisa Bainbridge is older than I am, but she had her Cathy just about the same time I had my



Ken, and we got quite chummy over the baby prams. She's not had a very easy time of it, poor woman, and now to have this happen in her old age—well, it's just too bad."

"Not an easy time?" asked Bethancourt cautiously, hoping this was not a reference to childbirth. "But I understood she was in easy circumstances, and her family seems to be very close."

"They are now," said Mrs. Tyzack with emphasis. "But it was a long time coming, I can tell you. It was her husband, you see. Very strict he was, with a nasty temper, *and* an awful snob. I'm afraid they didn't get on very well, though she never complained except to say once she'd been married too young. I know you won't believe this, but when the third child died—just a baby, it was, and born before its time, too—and Mrs. Connelly said to him how sorry she was, he said it didn't matter much, it had only been another girl, anyhow."

"That," said Bethancourt with distaste, "is unpardonable."

"Just so," said Mrs. Tyzack, nodding. "Although he changed his mind in the end, when he found out what a bother boys can be. Louisa had two boys in a row after that, but it was the last child, Cathy, who was always his favorite. Not that he didn't end by alienating her,

just as he had all the rest."

"He didn't get on with his children, then?"

"Far from it," said Mrs. Tyzack. "Everything was more or less fine when they were little, but when they began to grow up! Well, there were fireworks. He positively tormented the oldest boy, David. Nothing the child did was good enough. He's been a sore trial to his mother over the years, and it's my belief that it was all his father's doing. He wouldn't let the boy marry the girl he wanted to—threatened to cut him off without a penny if he went ahead with the wedding. Didn't think she was good enough for his son, although she was a decent, well-brought-up girl even if she wasn't no more than the baker's daughter. He forced David to join the navy, though he didn't want to and didn't stick it for very long. He tried to make his second son, Michael, join too, but Michael always had more spirit than David and he flat refused. Ran off to America, he did. But poor David was so muddled, he didn't know what to do. He was very devoted to little Cathy, too, and it's my belief he stuck it out so's not to be separated from her."

"He must have been sad when she married and moved to Australia," said Bethancourt, pouring more tea for them both.

"Why, thank you, dear, that's

kind of you. David wasn't just sad when she went, he nearly went out of his mind. He accused his father of driving her away, which was true enough. I'm not saying she doesn't have a happy marriage, because to the best of my knowledge she does, but she told her mother at the time that she was going to get away from her father. And then she slipped off one night, without him knowing. And they weren't married until they got to Melbourne. Mr. Bainbridge had old fashioned ideas about that sort of thing, and he refused ever to speak to her or have her in his house again. He said he would disinherit David for accusing him of driving her away, but he never did. I expect it was because David was the only one left, really. The two older girls were married and didn't come home much, and if they wrote, it was to their mother. Michael was off in America, and Cathy in Australia. Anyway, they had a lot of trouble with David from then on. He started drinking too much and lost a couple of jobs because of it. Was taken up for being drunk and disorderly, and for fighting once, too. It went on for years. Then all at once he ran off—no news of him at all for more than a year—and when he turned up again, he was sober, hardly drinking at all, and had married a French

girl. Mr. Bainbridge didn't take to that much, but there wasn't a thing he could do. David's wife was already pregnant, and once the baby was born, David never looked back. He dotes on that child to this day, and so did his father."

"That's a very interesting history," said Bethancourt. "When did Mr. Bainbridge die?"

"Oh, about ten years back. And things have been fine ever since. All the children come to visit their mother now, and she is so pleased to see them. They'll be here for Christmas—all except for Michael and Cathy—and all the grandchildren, too. That's why it's such a pity their nice time has to be ruined by this dreadful body."

"It is indeed," agreed Bethancourt. "Do your children come to you, too?"

"No, no. I go up to Ken's home in Bristol, ever since they had the baby."

Mrs. Tyzack chatted on about her grandchild for a few minutes, and then Bethancourt excused himself, saying he had better get back to the police.

Bethancourt found Scotland Yard back at the pub, having a well-deserved pint before proceeding to Mrs. Bainbridge's.

"I want to get that in before supper," said Carmichael, "because most of the old lady's family hasn't been here since

August and if we can get their movements over that weekend clear, we may be able to eliminate the whole lot."

But the interview with Mrs. Bainbridge and her daughter, Clarissa North, was uncomfortable and unprofitable. Both women were alarmed, despite Carmichael's reassurances, at having their family's movements investigated, nor could they remember very accurately what had occurred. Gibbons took notes furiously, occasionally getting muddled among the different names and relationships. It seemed, once they had at last finished, that it would have been virtually impossible for anyone to sneak a body up to the attic at any time except at night when everyone was asleep. At night, it was perfectly possible since everyone had slept on the second floor, with the exception of the French boy, who had slept in a little room off the kitchen. Unfortunately, both Mrs. Bainbridge and her daughter were early risers and could shed no light on how late the others might have stayed up on any given night. They suggested that Maureen Bainbridge or her cousin Daniel North might know better.

"And night is about the only time any of them could have committed the murder," said Gibbons afterward in the pub, with his notes strewn about

him. "None of them seems to have been alone for any appreciable time over the entire weekend. Although," he added apologetically, "it was awfully hard to keep track."

"I can see that it was," said Carmichael. "I've a large family myself, but at least they don't all mill about together over weekends, killing people. Well, never mind. We'll just have to interview the family members to see if their accounts tally with what we've got here."

"It *would* be useful to know at what time people were getting to bed," said Bethancourt. "If Mrs. Bainbridge and Mrs. North were rising between seven and eight every morning, and the younger members of the family were going to bed at four in the morning, well, it doesn't leave much time."

"On the other hand," put in Gibbons, "if they were going to bed virtuously before midnight, eight hours is plenty of time for any killer."

"It'll have to be checked into," sighed Carmichael. "And may have no bearing on the case at all, once we find out who the dead man was. Well, I'm for bed and start again tomorrow."

**“W**ake up, Philip.”  
Bethancourt opened a bleary

eye and reached for his glasses. "What time is it?"

"Quarter past eight," replied Gibbons.

Bethancourt groaned and sat up slowly. "Why don't you start without me?"

"I couldn't possibly. You're driving me to Brighton. Here." Gibbons picked up the dressing gown from the foot of the bed and threw it at his friend. "Mrs. Tyzack is bringing up early tea—you'd better put something on." He grinned. "I gathered you'd told her to give breakfast a miss."

"Yes, I did," said Bethancourt, flinging on his robe. "I loathe food first thing in the morning. Good morning, Cerberus."

Cerberus thumped his tail on the carpet, and Gibbons knelt to rub his chest.

"I am going to brush my teeth," announced Bethancourt. "When I return, I hope you will have devised a suitable explanation for your ill-considered phrase, 'driving to Brighton.'"

Bethancourt took some time in the bathroom, and the tea had arrived by the time he emerged. He took the cup Gibbons poured for him and sipped cautiously at it. "Now then, Jack," he said.

"We are going to Brighton because we've had word that David Bainbridge has returned

from France and I've been told to see him."

"When you put it like that," said Bethancourt, "it seems more reasonable. I don't suppose it's more than a couple of hours anyway."

"That's right," said Gibbons. "I will even volunteer to drive there, if you will drive back. Now, do put on your clothes, there's a good chap."

They arrived at the offices of David Bainbridge's import-export business shortly before lunchtime and were shown into his office by a youthful, if severe, secretary. Bainbridge himself was a sober-faced man with dark circles beneath his eyes, dressed conservatively in a blue suit and unobtrusive tie. He greeted them quietly and offered them seats and coffee.

"My wife told me the news last night," he said. "It's an appalling thing for my mother."

"It is indeed," agreed Gibbons, "but she seems to be bearing up well. Your sister, Mrs. North, is with her."

"That's good," he said. "One can always count on Clarissa. Well, how may I help you gentlemen?"

"First of all, Mr. Bainbridge, we'd like to know of any visit you've made to your mother's house since August."

Bainbridge grimaced. "Only one," he answered. "I usually go

up more frequently, but various business emergencies have prevented me this fall. In fact, I planned to be there a week ago, to help with Christmas things, but just when I was ready to go, I got another call from France." He sighed. "Well, let me see. I was there for the Bank Holiday in August, and then again about a month later."

"Were your family with you in September?"

"No. No, I was alone that weekend."

"Did you go up to the third floor or attic on either of those occasions?"

"Oh, I see," said Bainbridge. "No, I'm afraid I didn't. I can't remember the last time I was up there, in fact."

"That's all right, sir, no one else can either. Now, if you'd be so good as to go over with us how you spent the holiday weekend."

Bainbridge looked startled. "The holiday weekend?" he repeated. "Was that when—"

"We're not certain, sir," replied Gibbons implacably, "but it is a possibility at this time."

Bainbridge's account of the weekend did not measurably differ from his mother's.

"One last thing," said Gibbons when he had done, "we'd appreciate it if you could give us Renaud Fibrier's address."

"I'm afraid I can't do that, sergeant. I don't know it."

"Well then, the name and address of your partner."

"That I can give you, but I'm afraid he'll be no help. You see, Renaud and his family are estranged."

Gibbons was surprised. "And yet you took him to your family reunion?" he said.

"Oh, yes. I can explain that. You see, Renaud is his father's eldest son, but I'm afraid they've never got on very well together. I've always found the boy most charming myself. Very polite and so on. Anyway, about a year or more ago, Renaud got himself into some scrape or another, and his father absolutely refused to help him again. Renaud ran off and ceased to communicate with his family at all. His father was very upset. Then last August I was in London and happened to run into him. It wasn't the most congenial meeting—he wasn't disposed to trust me at first, even though I had some sympathy for him." Bainbridge smiled. "I had some differences with my own father in my youth, so I wasn't prepared to lay quite *all* the blame at Renaud's door. At any rate, I managed to make sure he was all right for money and to get his phone number, although he wouldn't tell me where he was staying. I called his father, and it was he who suggested I invite Renaud to our family gathering. He hoped, I suppose, that

seeing how happily my own situation had turned out would influence Renaud. But I'm afraid it didn't."

"It was not a success?"

Bainbridge sighed and rubbed his chin. "No," he answered. "Family life bored Renaud. He was very pleasant, but he insisted on taking the first train on Monday morning, even though I had understood that he would stay until Tuesday. I had to get up to drive him, at some inconvenience to myself—no one else was even up yet. Still, I thought it better that he leave if he wished to. You can't force family feeling on people."

"That's true, sir." Gibbons nodded and slowly closed his notebook. "Well, thank you very much, sir. That's quite clear. We may call on you again once we discover who this unfortunate man was."

"Certainly, sergeant. I hope you clear it up quickly."

They took their leave and made their way back to the car where Cerberus waited for them with a doleful look on his face.

"It's all right, boy," murmured Bethancourt a little absently.

"Well," said Gibbons, settling himself into his seat while Bethancourt maneuvered out of the parking space, "that was a fat lot of help. I wish to God they'd hurry up and identify the body. At this rate, I'm going

to miss my Christmas holidays altogether."

"There's still a week to go, Jack. Who knows? Maybe there'll be good news waiting for us when we get back to Dorset."

Gibbons grunted disconsolately, and they drove on in silence. In a few minutes, Gibbons roused himself to point out that Bethancourt had made a wrong turn.

"You should have stayed on the A27," he said.

"Actually," said Bethancourt, "I thought we'd run up to London."

"What on earth for?"

"I thought we'd see Maureen again. David Bainbridge was no help at all as to when they all went to bed over the weekend."

"Phillip, it's perfectly likely that the body was put there after the weekend."

"If it was, that exonerates the family."

"Except for Cathy Dresler in Australia. We've only her word for it that there was no body there before the weekend."

"Yes, but it seems unlikely that she would have any motive. She's been living in Australia for years. Why should she go around murdering people in England?"

"Maybe our corpse was Australian."

They wrangled comfortably

over this point as the car shot northward to London.

When they arrived, Maureen Bainbridge, to Bethancourt's disappointment, had just begun a two hour lecture, so they sought out Daniel North instead. He seemed pleased at this distraction from his normal duties and insisted on giving them tea. Then he leaned his elbows on his desk and frowned in an effort to recall the Bank Holiday weekend.

"Well, let's see," he said. "I went down on Friday with Dad—Mother was already there. We got a late start and were the last to arrive. There was dinner, of course . . . yes, and we all went up early, except for Maureen and Renaud. They stayed up talking for a bit, but it couldn't have been long because I heard her come up just as I was turning out my light."

"They got on well, then?" asked Gibbons.

North looked offended. "Renaud is certainly the type that women are attracted to," he said, "but Maureen is hardly that superficial. She wouldn't take up with someone like him."

"Perhaps," suggested Bethancourt tactfully, "their late chat was rather onesided?"

North smiled, appeased. "I expect so," he said.

"You seem to have known

Renaud prior to that weekend," said Gibbons, "but the rest of the family had never met him before. How is that?"

"Met him one evening at a club," North said. "A friend of mine knew someone in his party, and after some talk, Renaud and I discovered our connection. He seemed quite pleasant at first, but I didn't care for the whole crowd. I'm sure they were doing drugs, and their behavior, well, it left much to be desired."

"Then you wouldn't know anything about his present whereabouts?"

"Certainly not." North was affronted again. "Uncle David should know, if that's what you want."

"Unfortunately," said Gibbons, "he doesn't."

"Oh." North paused thoughtfully. "Wait a moment," he said slowly, "I believe Renaud did say something about where he was staying. Yes, Camden Town, I think it was. North London, anyhow."

Gibbons jotted "Camden?" in his notebook. "Thank you," he said, "that may be helpful. Now, sir, if you could go on with your description of the weekend?"

"Yes, of course. Where was I up to? Saturday? Everyone was up quite late that night. It was well past two by the time the last of us went to bed. I think the last up were Uncle David,



Aunt Cathy, Maureen, Renaud, and myself."

"That brings us to Sunday."

"Yes, let's see. Oh, Sunday was the night we went to the pub. Just Maureen, Renaud, and I. We ran into a couple there that Renaud knew from London." A look of distaste came over North's face. "Not the sort of people I usually associate with."

"Of course not," said Bethancourt, his voice full of false sympathy. He was beginning to think North was a bit of a prig.

"Could you describe them for us, sir?" asked Gibbons, ignoring his friend.

"Well, the man—Dick was his name—was all right. He was about my age, I suppose, dark-haired and wearing a leather jacket. I think he said he was a mechanic. The girl was called Penny. Bleached hair and too much eye makeup, and wearing a dress that kept slipping off her shoulder. Way off."

Bethancourt made a "tsk-tsk" sound, and Gibbons glared at him.

"You stayed at the pub how long?" he asked.

"Maureen and I left first," said North. "Renaud was behaving quite badly. He'd spent most of the weekend chatting up Maureen, but now he'd switched to Penny. Naturally I didn't mind that, and Maureen didn't seem to care, but

after all, Penny was with another man. I didn't think Penny was very happy with his attentions, but when I got up to go to the men's room, I saw his hand on her leg. No," he corrected himself, "not on her leg. He'd pushed her dress up and had his hand on the inside of her thigh."

"No!" exclaimed Bethancourt, feigning shock. Gibbons kicked him surreptitiously.

"I can quite see how you felt," he said.

"Yes," said North, gratified by this display of sympathy. "Well, you can imagine that I came back from the w.c. and took Maureen right off."

"Of course," said Gibbons. "Was everyone else still up when you got back?"

North took a moment to put aside righteous indignation. "No," he said. "Not everyone. Just, let's see, Aunt Cathy, and my father and Aunt Bernice. But they went off to bed twenty minutes or so after we got back. Maureen and I stayed up a bit. It must have been about midnight—perhaps a little after—when I said goodnight and Maureen went to get a glass of milk to take to bed with her."

"And Renaud hadn't yet returned?"

"No. Well, if he had, he didn't come into the living room." He paused and scratched his chin.

"That brings us to Monday.

Most of us left that evening so as to be at work on Tuesday. Mother stayed on, and so did Maureen and her parents—they always take a week in the summer to visit Grandmother.”

“Yes,” said Gibbons, consulting his notes. “They all stayed until Thursday, except for David Bainbridge, who was called away on business Tuesday.” He looked up. “Well, that’s very clear, Mr. North, thank you. You heard nothing, I suppose, during any of the nights you spent there?”

“Not me,” replied North. “I’m a heavy sleeper.”

Gibbons thanked him and rose to leave.

Outside, Bethancourt walked Cerberus round the block while Gibbons phoned Carmichael in Dorset to say they were starting back. Having supplied themselves with sandwiches and coffee for the drive back, they threaded their way out of London and were soon spinning along the M3 under heavy skies.

“It’s going to rain,” observed Gibbons.

“Or snow,” said Bethancourt. “Dorset should look very pretty in the snow. Very Christmas-like and all that.”

“Don’t be silly,” answered Gibbons. “It’s not cold enough to snow.” Then he went on, rather abruptly, “I wonder if we shouldn’t make more of an effort to find Renaud Fibrier than

we have been doing. The only members of the family who knew anything about him confirm the bad reputation his own father gave him. Supposing he and that other chap fought over the girl after North and Maureen had left. Fibrier might have killed him and put the body in the attic after everyone else was in bed. It certainly fits with his wanting to leave first thing in the morning.”

Bethancourt nodded. “That’s true, Jack. I think it would be very interesting to find out what sort of trouble he was in in France.”

“Very interesting,” agreed Gibbons. “We’ll run it by Carmichael and see if he doesn’t want to put in a call to France this afternoon.”

Chief Inspector Carmichael did. They found him at the local police station, where he informed them that missing persons was no further along with connecting the body to anyone on their lists. He was considerably cheered, however, by the thought of Renaud Fibrier as murderer and Dick the mechanic as victim.

“We’ll have to check all the hotels and B&B’s in the area,” he said. “If we can find their last names, it should be easy enough to trace them in London. If we start now,” he added wistfully, “we might even be able to go back to town tonight.

I'll just ring the Sûreté and then we can have some supper and get on with it."

"I'll meet you at the pub," said Bethancourt. "I want a change of clothes. It won't take me long."

Mrs. Tyzack's house was quiet as Bethancourt let himself in. There was a light burning in the front hall, and he paused by the registry book lying open on the hall table. Pulling off his gloves, he turned the pages back once again to the late August entries and was pleased to find that Dick Tottle and Penny Cranston had conformed to custom and inscribed their names and addresses.

Turning away, he had another thought and, bypassing the stairs, headed for the back of the house and the sitting room, where Cerberus was greeted with joyful barks by the terrier.

"Hello," said Mrs. Tyzack. "I didn't hear you come in. Can I get you anything?"

Bethancourt smiled and dropped into the easy chair opposite her. "What I really need is information," he said. "Can you think back to the August Bank Holiday weekend and a couple of guests you had then?"

The names meant nothing to her, but once he had described the couple and placed the weekend in her mind by mentioning

the Bainbridge reunion, she began to remember.

"Yes," she said slowly. "Yes, I think they came on the Saturday. Here, let me just fetch the reservation book—"

Bethancourt politely performed this service for her. She pored over the entries for a moment and then looked up and beamed at him.

"Here it is," she said. "They came on the Saturday evening, booked through till Monday. I remember them now—they had the room across the hall from yours and were rather quiet. Spent a lot of time at the pub, I believe."

"That's splendid," said Bethancourt warmly. "Now, what I really need to know is: did you see them returning from the pub on Sunday or leaving Monday morning?"

She thought for a moment. "No," she said at last. "No, I shouldn't have seen them Sunday night—oh, yes, of course. Look, it's here in the book as well. They paid up on Sunday afternoon, saying they'd be off on the first train on Monday. Yes, the girl explained she had to work Monday, although I don't remember now what she said she did. I asked if they'd want breakfast, but they said no, it would be too early, they'd just get up and leave. So I had a nice lie-in because the other guests didn't want breakfast

till nine. They were gone by the time I got up—I remember I checked their room to make sure.”

She smiled up at him, pleased with her success. “Is that what you wanted?” she asked. “Is it important?”

“It’s very important,” answered Bethancourt, beaming back at her. “Mrs. Tyzack, you’re a marvel.”

Carmichael and Gibbons were equally pleased when Bethancourt joined them at the Lion’s Head.

“That’s pure jam,” said Carmichael with satisfaction. “We might as well start back directly after supper then. Thank you, Bethancourt.” He fished in his pocket for a train schedule, pulling out a whole sheaf of papers in the process.

“I can drive you back, sir,” offered Bethancourt.

“Why, thank you again,” responded the chief inspector. “I—oh, damme.” He was gazing at a slip of paper in dismay. “Bethancourt, I forgot. When I talked to the Yard earlier, they said several urgent messages had been left for you. I do apologize for not telling you sooner.”

“Urgent?” asked Gibbons, startled.

“From a young lady. Name of Marla Tate.”

Gibbons laughed heartily while Bethancourt said, “Oh,

my God,” and Carmichael raised a bushy eyebrow.

“It’s Phillip’s girlfriend,” explained Gibbons. “And it’s hardly likely to be urgent.”

“To Marla it is,” said Bethancourt glumly. “I’d better go outside and ring her before I eat.”

He returned while the others were in the midst of their meal and breathed a sigh of relief as he sat down.

“Disaster has been averted,” he announced. “There’s a Christmas party tonight that I forgot, but I promised her I’d be back in time for it.” He looked at his watch. “Can we be ready to leave in forty-five minutes?”

“Yes, by all means,” answered Carmichael. “Mustn’t keep a pretty young lady waiting,” he added with a wink. “I assume she is pretty, Bethancourt?”

Gibbons guffawed, thinking of Marla’s flawless beauty, while Bethancourt replied modestly that he found her so.

“Hello, Phillip,” said Gibbons cheerfully. “Did I wake you?”

“Yes,” answered Bethancourt tartly, shifting the phone to light a cigarette. “It’s only nine thirty, and that party went on till all hours.”

“I thought you’d want to hear the latest.”

Bethancourt sighed. “I sup-

pose I do," he answered. "I take it by the tone of your voice it's good news?"

"It is," Gibbons assured him. "Dick Tottle's no longer at that address you got from Mrs. Ty-zack—in fact, no one is. The building was razed to make way for a new block of flats last October. But Penny Cranston is listed in the phone directory. We haven't talked to her yet—she's out, but it's only a matter of time. Best of all, Carmichael heard from the Sûreté this morning. Renaud Fibrier was involved in several brawls, was convicted of petty larceny, and was involved in another brawl just before he disappeared. Unofficially, the police in his hometown say that he was once accused of rape but no charges were ever brought, and that he stole from his parents as well, who naturally never pressed charges. They're sure the latter is true, but unsure about the first, the source of the accusation being somewhat unreliable."

Bethancourt gave a low whistle. "Not a very good record," he observed. "I wonder how much of that David Bainbridge knew."

"Probably not very much," said Gibbons cheerfully. "He was likely just told that Renaud was 'in trouble' from time to time. I believe that's the usual conversational refuge of parents with problem children.

Anyway, Fibrier could well be our man, Phillip. We're trying to track him down. Carmichael's sent out a bulletin on him, and I'm to start trying to find out where he was staying in London."

"Starting in Camden?"

"Starting in Camden. Do you want to come?"

"And spend all day knocking on one door after another? No, thank you. I'm going back to my nice warm bed with my nice warm girlfriend."

"Fine. You'll be sorry when I find the place myself."

"I'll join you tomorrow. Plenty of doors left for then."

"Ha! You don't know how lucky I'm feeling."

"Well, I'm not feeling lucky at all, and I wouldn't want to ruin your day," retorted Bethancourt. "Call me when you get back to the Yard."

"Very well," said Gibbons. "But you'll be sorry." He rang off and contemplated the long list in front of him. It consisted of all the hotels and bed and breakfasts in Camden and had been compiled by himself with the help of the London telephone directory. Bethancourt was right, of course: he couldn't possibly get through all of them in one day. Moreover, there was no guarantee that Fibrier hadn't been staying with friends. But that line of inquiry would have to wait until the Sûreté had

done their best to find some of Fibrier's acquaintances and had discovered, if they could, any English connections.

He sighed, wishing he had been able to persuade Bethancourt to accompany him, and went forth to do his job.

His feeling of luck soon evaporated in the cold, damp day and, indeed, he met with no success. It was well after dark and he was chilled to the bone when he decided to stop for the day. He found a public call box and rang Penny Cranston's number as he had at intervals throughout the day, but once again there was no answer. Sighing, he turned away toward the underground to return to the Yard and report to Chief Inspector Carmichael.

The next morning Bethancourt consented to accompany his friend on his cheerless rounds of lodgings in Camden Town, with the proviso that they stop at Bond Street first.

"What on earth for?" asked Gibbons.

"Marla's Christmas present, of course," replied Bethancourt. "She is furious with me for letting this investigation interfere with the holiday festivities, and she will get still angrier before we're done."

"Oh, very well," said Gibbons. "But it had better not take long."

"It won't," Bethancourt as-

sured him. "It need only be handsome, very extravagant, and green."

Indeed, Bethancourt accomplished his goal as swiftly as the Christmas crowds permitted, but Gibbons was horrified at the cost of the emerald and diamond bracelet.

"Surely that's a bit much," he said in a low voice.

"You forget how annoyed she is with me," replied Bethancourt. "This will put her right in a minute."

"It bloody well ought to," muttered Gibbons.

From Asprey's, they proceeded to Camden Town, but success did not crown their efforts. Moreover, it was a slow, painstaking business, asking people to remember a young Frenchman who might have stayed with them last August and then to look up past records. It was the kind of thing Bethancourt hated, and Gibbons soon found him more hindrance than help, for he amused himself by trying to charm the innkeepers senseless or, when that palled, by poking about shamelessly in everything he could find while Gibbons conducted the interview.

They lunched solidly at a pub, Bethancourt drinking several pints of Old Peculiar to fortify himself, and then went back to it under increasingly threatening skies.

"It's going to rain again," said Bethancourt at about four o'clock as they tramped down Anson Road.

"Probably," agreed Gibbons.

"Must we do very many more? In all probability he was staying with friends."

"We'll stop at five," said Gibbons consolingly.

"And get caught in rush hour? Thanks very much."

"Here's the next," said Gibbons. "And do try to behave, Phillip."

A middle-aged woman greeted them pleasantly and announced that she wasn't taking any boarders over the holidays.

"Goodness!" she said once Gibbons had explained their purpose. "Last August, you say? Now that's difficult to remember. I'll have to pull out the books for that."

"We are fairly certain he would have checked out in late August," said Bethancourt with a smile. "But unfortunately, we're not at all sure when he would have arrived. We're working on the assumption at the moment that he arrived no earlier than the beginning of July."

"Well," she answered, setting a heavy book down on the counter with a thump, "I haven't had anyone staying that long. A two month stay I would have remembered. There was that American family—they

stayed three weeks." She opened the book and began flipping through the pages. "And I did have a whole group of Frenchmen in, but they only stayed a day or two. And that was earlier on, I think. Half a mo'!" She looked up at them suddenly. "There *was* a young man that stayed a fortnight or so. Only I thought he was Swiss."

"Swiss?" asked Gibbons.

"Yes," she answered, going back to the book and rapidly turning the leaves. "There was a group—I'm sure the couple were Swiss. There was another man, too, I think. They all stayed a few days and then, when the others left, one stayed on and I switched him to a single." She bent over the book, running her finger down the page. "I *think* it was August," she muttered. "Yes, here we are: 11 August, two doubles. The others left on the sixteenth, and the one that was left changed rooms. Here he is: Renaud Fibrier. Wasn't that the name you mentioned?"

Bethancourt gave a loud whoop of triumph and, leaning over the counter, kissed her soundly on the cheek. "That's it, adorable woman," he said, "that's it! We've found him, Jack!"

Gibbons was grinning broadly. "When did he check out?"

"On the twenty-ninth," she



answered, consulting the book. "The Tuesday after Bank Holiday."

"That fits," said Gibbons to Bethancourt. "He returns from the murder, packs up, and clears off. He's probably been back on the Continent for months."

They thanked her for her help and left, well pleased with themselves.

There was a call box on the corner and here Gibbons stopped, fishing in his pocket for change.

"I'm going to try Penny Cranston again," he said.

Bethancourt looked surprised. "You did that half an hour ago," he said mildly.

Gibbons grinned at him. "I'm feeling lucky," he said.

His luck held true. In a moment he emerged, his grin broader than ever.

"She's home," he announced. "We can go straight over. Let's grab a taxi—it's not far."

Penny Cranston's bedsitter was small and rather dirty. There was a pile of clothes on the single armchair, the carpet had seen better days and had faded to a pinky-brown, and the kitchen sink was crowded with unwashed dishes.

Penny herself had a slatternly appearance; her hair was bleached an incredible shade of yellow, revealing almost an inch of dark brown at the roots. She was thin, but not elegantly so;

rather, she gave the impression of being scrawny except for her breasts, which were large and swung freely beneath a shiny purple shirt. She seemed suspicious of them, despite Gibbons' reassurances and Bethancourt's scrupulous politeness. Indeed, the latter appeared to make her uneasy and, as if in reaction, she did not offer them seats, but only leaned against the little breakfast table, planted squarely in the center of the worn carpet.

However, she was willing enough, once their mission was explained, to discuss Renaud Fibrier.

"That one," she said, and snorted to show her opinion of him. "I haven't seen him in months, nor want to, neither."

"We're particularly interested in the August Bank Holiday weekend," said Gibbons, and waited, a little anxiously, for her reaction.

But the mention of it did not appear to stir any deep feelings. "That was when I gave him the shove-off," she nodded. "Down in that nowhere place in the country."

"Just so," said Gibbons, a little disappointed, but still hoping. "You went down with your boyfriend?" She looked blank, so he added, "Dick Tottle?"

"Oh." She giggled. "Dick's not my boyfriend. He's just a friend."

Gibbons apologized for misunderstanding. "Anyway, you ran into Renaud Fibrier?"

"Not exactly ran into. We were supposed to meet him there."

"I see."

Bit by bit the story emerged. She had met Renaud Fibrier in a nightclub a fortnight or so before that weekend and they had had, she stated defiantly, a good time. Then he had told her he was going to Dorset for the holiday weekend and suggested she come along. It would be awfully dull, he said, but between the two of them, they might liven it up a bit and he could use the free meal ticket. He couldn't invite her to stay with him, but she could stay cheaply in a B&B. They could appear to run into each other by accident.

"I couldn't get away till Saturday evening," she said. "I was scheduled to work the restaurant, see? So we fixed up to meet at the village pub on Saturday night. Renaud said he might have to wait until after dinner to slip out, but I should just sit tight at the pub. Only then I didn't fancy the idea of waiting for hours in some dead and gone pub, and besides, when I rung the B&B, it was more than we'd thought. So I asked Dick if he'd like to come with me. I told him what was up," she added. "He knew it was Re-

naud I was going to see."

"So you met Renaud on Saturday?"

Her eyes flashed. "That's just what we didn't do," she said. "We went to the pub for dinner and stayed till closing, but he never showed. I was mad, I can tell you. I wanted to go straight to London, but Dick pointed out that we'd reserved the room for Sunday and the B&B lady would probably make us pay for it anyway. So we stayed. I was sure glad I'd thought of asking Dick along—I'd've gone out of my mind in that place otherwise. We went back to the pub the next night—there wasn't no place else—and lo and behold, in comes Renaud. And then I see why he didn't show the night before because he's got a real snooty looker on his arm. So I says to Dick, 'Let's get out of here,' only before we get the chance, Renaud comes over and is introducing us, and everybody's sitting down. I didn't want to make a fuss in front of that girl, so I sat tight for a bit. And you know what that no-gooder does next?"

"He—er—started chatting you up?" ventured Bethancourt.

"Chatting up's not the half of it," she replied fiercely. "He started feeling my leg underneath the table, just as if everything was fine. I tried to brush him off, but he was back in a

flash. Like I said, I didn't want to make a fuss, but was I ever glad when that girl and her cousin took off. I gave him a piece of my mind then, I did."

"And well-deserved, too."

"I told him just what I thought of him and his fancy bit, and then I said he could just tear up my phone number because I wouldn't be answering calls from him no more. And then I took Dick and left."

"Did he follow you?"

She sniffed. "Not him. I meant what I said and he knew it."

Gibbons and Bethancourt exchanged glances, hope waning. If Dick Tottle had left Dorset hale and hearty . . .

"And you and Dick left by the first train on Monday?"

"That's right. I had early shift at the restaurant, you see."

"Yes," said Gibbons, disappointed. "I take it, in view of what you've said, that Renaud didn't ride back to town with you?"

"Of course not," she replied, amazed at his stupidity.

"You didn't see him on the station platform?" asked Bethancourt.

"No. There wasn't anybody there. Dick and I were early and had to wait a bit and we didn't see a soul except for one man who drove into the car park right when the train arrived."

"He didn't let anybody off?"

"We didn't see. We were busy boarding. A blue Ford Escort, it was. I remember because Dick's a mechanic and he was laughing at me trying to make out the makes of cars, but I knew that one because my sister's got an Escort." She looked curious. "Did you think Renaud had taken the same train as us?"

"Yes," answered Gibbons, dispiritedly. "We did."

"Well, maybe he did come on at the last minute. We were waiting, like I said, and got on right away."

"That's certainly possible," said Bethancourt. "Thank you very much, Miss Cranston. You've been an enormous help."

Gibbons paused in the act of picking up his coat. "I expect you still keep in touch with Dick Tottle?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Saw him last night, in fact."

"Could you let us have his address and phone number?"

She gave them the information from memory and they bade her goodbye, making their way down the narrow stairs in silence.

"You don't think she was lying?" asked Gibbons hopelessly.

"No," answered Bethancourt. "Anyway, if she was, you'll soon know when you see Tottle."

"Aren't you coming with me?"

asked Gibbons in surprise.

Bethancourt shook his head. "Another Christmas party," he said. "I've got to dress and meet Marla. It's getting late."

He swung open the front door, and they stepped out into the chill drizzle.

"I'll call you tomorrow. Don't look so down, Jack. We were wrong, that's all. Tomorrow we'll come up with a better theory."

"Yes, all right. Tomorrow, then, Phillip."

Gibbons turned away from his friend, in search of a call box and Dick Tottle, desperately wishing he was the one going to a Christmas party. Then it occurred to him that there was no reason he should not partake of some holiday cheer himself, at least after he had interviewed Tottle. Accordingly, he put through two calls instead of one and, with his plans for the evening made, went off to see Dick Tottle in a better frame of mind.

Marla was annoyed with him again, but Bethancourt would hardly have noticed if she hadn't announced the fact. He had, she said, been preoccupied during the whole of the cocktail party they had attended, and he was to stop thinking of his silly case and rouse himself for dinner, which was to be eaten with two other couples. Bethancourt meekly agreed to this on the

condition that he could phone Gibbons from the restaurant. Gibbons was not home, however, and it was not long before Bethancourt dropped out of the conversation and began to smoke abstractedly. Marla nudged him with a steely look in her green eyes.

"Darling," she said, "do you want any more of those escargots or can the waiter clear?"

"What?" Bethancourt became aware that everyone else had long since finished their first course. "Oh, no, have him take them away."

He lit another cigarette and leaned back out of the waiter's way. Something had occurred to him during the cocktail party, triggered by a chance remark, and he was desperate to get hold of Gibbons and check it out. It was such a simple solution that he couldn't help but feel that there must be something against it or they would have thought of it earlier.

"You're not very lively tonight, Phillip," said Shelley.

"Late party last night," he replied absently. Then he stubbed out his cigarette and rose. "Will you excuse me a minute? I've just remembered something."

Marla looked daggers at him, but the others all murmured politely and went on with their conversation.

Gibbons was still not home.

Annoyed, Bethancourt tapped his fingers impatiently against the receiver. He felt it was quite unreasonable of his friend to be out on the town just when he was wanted.

Bethancourt returned to the table and, after being kicked sharply on the ankle by Marla, managed to enter into the conversation with some animation. He was halfway through his entree when another thought struck him. He turned it over in his mind for a few minutes, and then bolted the rest of his dinner and asked to be excused again.

Once more there was no answer at Gibbons', but with this new idea in his brain, Bethancourt was in no mood to sit through the rest of dinner. Returning to the dining room, he announced he had been called away and dashed off, thinking to himself it was lucky he had come up to scratch on Marla's Christmas present because otherwise she would never forgive him.

Outside, it was beginning to rain again. Bethancourt hailed a taxi and gave Gibbons' address. He was determined to plant himself on the doorstep and wait even if Gibbons stayed out until three in the morning. In reality, however, he soon grew cold and went round the corner to wait in the nearest pub. Bursting with his news,

the minutes dragged by like hours until at last Gibbons answered his call—the fifth in half an hour.

"I'm round the corner," announced Bethancourt. "I'll be up directly." And he rang off before Gibbons could protest.

Gibbons had not yet undressed. He felt it was unreasonable of Bethancourt to desert him for the evening and then to come tramping up to his flat at a quarter past eleven when he was trying to have an early night. Resignedly, he poured himself a scotch.

"I've got the answer!" Bethancourt announced dramatically as soon as Gibbons opened the door.

Gibbons eyed him as he stood flushed with the cold, eyes bright behind his glasses, grinning happily.

"You've been drinking," he said.

"Of course I've been drinking," replied Bethancourt, pushing past him and shedding his overcoat. "I've just come from cocktails and dinner. At least I'm not still drinking," he added, seeing the glass in Gibbons' hand. Then he rounded on his friend and asked abruptly, "Did Dick Tottle confirm Penny's story?"

"In every particular," answered Gibbons, getting another glass and filling it. He handed the drink to Bethan-

court who took it mechanically and sat down. "Now, what's this idea of yours?"

"It's not an idea," retorted Bethancourt, "it's the solution to the whole puzzle. Who the dead man is and who killed him."

"Well, who?"

"The dead man was Renaud Fibrier."

"I thought we'd just decided he was the murderer."

"We were wrong. Think about it, Jack—he's everything we want in a victim. The right age, the right looks, and he disappeared late on Sunday night or early Monday morning."

Gibbons thought about it. "So you're casting David Bainbridge as the murderer?"

"Why not? After all, Renaud spent the weekend chatting up his daughter, on whom he dotes. Who knows, maybe she even succumbed. Or maybe Renaud was blackmailing him—he sounds the sort of chap who wouldn't balk at a little extortion. And we've only Bainbridge's word for it that Fibrier left for London early Monday. Penny and Dick never saw him."

"Well, yes," said Gibbons reflectively, "but wait a minute, Phillip. We know Renaud checked out of his lodgings on Tuesday. He could hardly do that if he was murdered on Sunday night."

Bethancourt waved a hand

airily. "That's because when we talked to Mrs. Whatsis at his lodgings, we were expecting to hear that he had checked out on Monday or Tuesday. We didn't ask her the right questions. If I hadn't pressed Mrs. Tyzack when I was inquiring after Penny and Dick, she would just have said that they left on Monday, not that they paid up on Sunday afternoon and she hadn't seen them since."

"That's true," said Gibbons.

"And, Jack, I've remembered something else. You know what Penny said about a Ford Escort? Well, there was a blue one parked outside Bainbridge's office when we went to see him."

"Was there?" said Gibbons, more confused by this piece of information than enlightened.

"Yes!" said Bethancourt triumphantly. "If Bainbridge killed Renaud during the night, then he had to substantiate his story about taking him to the train in the morning, you know."

"Of course," said Gibbons, the light dawning. "He had his wife with him. He'd have to get up early and what better way to lend verisimilitude to an otherwise—"

"Just so."

"That's more promising," said Gibbons. "You could be right, Phillip. Look here, we'll go round to Fibrier's lodgings again first thing in the morning, and if that turns out right, I'll put it

up to Carmichael. If the dead man is Fibrier, it should be easy enough to confirm through the Sûreté. Then we can go on from there. It's going to be tricky, though, getting evidence."

"Bah!" said Bethancourt, finishing off his drink. "His own words damn him. If Fibrier was dead in the attic on Monday morning, the best barrister in the world is going to find it difficult to explain why Bainbridge claims to have driven him to the station."

"Well, perhaps," said Gibbons, grinning. He raised his glass. "You may well have it, Phillip. Congratulations."

They interrupted Renaud's landlady during her first cup of coffee the next morning. She poured coffee for them while they explained what they wanted and then went to consult her registration book.

"Look here," she said, returning with the book. "I remember now. I've even made a note in the book, but I missed it yesterday somehow." She set the volume down and took up her coffee. "Renaud came to me," she said slowly, as if trying to get the memory clear in her head, "and said he'd been invited to the country for the weekend but would be back on the Monday night. I said I could probably rent the room for the weekend, it being the holiday

and all, but if I didn't he'd have to pay for it. So he moved his things out and I put them in the closet. I did rent the room for the weekend, you can see by the book, but he never came back."

"So his things are still here?"

She shook her head. "No. On the Tuesday another man came and said Renaud had to leave in a hurry—his father had fallen ill, I think. Anyway, he paid me up to Tuesday and returned the key Renaud had gone off with and took his things away."

"Would you recognize this man again?" asked Gibbons eagerly.

She looked doubtful. "I might," she said, "and then again I might not. He was older, I remember, and looked respectable."

Gibbons described David Bainbridge. "Could that have been the man?" he asked.

"It could be," she agreed, "there's nothing against it to my recollection. But I wouldn't know until I saw him, and even then I'm not sure I'd recognize him."

They thanked her profusely for her help, warned her they might call again, and left on swift, jubilant feet for Scotland Yard.

Carmichael was enormously pleased with both of them. He put through a call to the Sûreté and then sat puffing out his



mustaches at them.

"Well done," he said several times. "That's a champion bit of work, lads."

In an hour or two, the copy of Renaud Fibrier's dental records arrived and were matched by forensics with those of the previously unidentified body. An air of satisfaction pervaded Carmichael's office.

"I'll just ring down to Brighton and have Bainbridge detained," he said. "Then we'd better drive down ourselves. Bethancourt, would you care to accompany us?"

Bethancourt accepted this offer, and Carmichael smiled and nodded while he dialed the Brighton station. He made his request, and in seconds all the light had gone out of the room. The two young men watched Carmichael anxiously, but they could make little of the few monosyllables he spoke. At last he rang off and sighed.

"We're too late," he announced. "Bainbridge committed suicide yesterday."

"What?" exclaimed Gibbons.

"He must have realized," said Bethancourt, "that it was only a matter of time before we identified the body."

"Did he leave a note?"

"Yes," answered Carmichael, "but it's hardly a confession. It asks his wife to forgive him and says it will be better this way. Then he says she knows he's

always been a weak man, and that he's glad to have found the strength to do this."

"Well," said Gibbons dully, "that's that."

It was raining again and the evening air was chill. Bethancourt paused for a moment in the vestibule while Cerberus shook himself dry. Then he firmly pressed the bell.

She was surprised to see him. Her eyes were red with weeping and she looked tired, but she invited him in politely.

"I didn't expect the police again," she said.

"I'm not the police, Maureen," said Bethancourt gently, divesting himself of his overcoat. "I came to satisfy a personal curiosity. There is no reason for you to talk to me if you don't want to. But if you do, it will be between you and me."

"I don't mind," she said. "But I don't know if I can tell you anything more."

"Your father either wrote or called you before he died," said Bethancourt simply.

Her eyes widened a little. "How do you know that?" she asked.

"The note that he left was addressed only to your mother, yet you were very dear to him. I've been thinking it all over, and my guess is that you know what happened that night, the night Renaud Fibrier died, that

you knew before you heard from your father. You know because you were there."

She did not look at him, nor did she speak.

"Did Renaud rape you?" Bethancourt asked softly.

She flung her head up in surprise and pain, and tears started in her eyes. "Yes!" she said, almost defiantly. "If that's what you came to find out: yes, he did. He held a knife to my throat and threatened to kill me if I didn't do what he said. I was terrified. . . ."

"I'm sorry," said Bethancourt. "I'm truly sorry."

She had begun to cry again, and she wiped the tears furiously from her face. "How did you know?"

"He raped another girl once, in France," answered Bethancourt. "I couldn't think why your father would have killed him. After all, he knew he was a bad sort long before that weekend. But it wasn't until tonight, when I realized your father had communicated with you separately, that I thought of the answer." He paused. "Your father must have come down to the kitchen for something and found you."

"Yes. He couldn't sleep and came down for some milk."

"There was the knife," continued Bethancourt, "the one Renaud had used to threaten you, still lying where he cast it

aside afterward. Anyway, when your father came down, you were in shock. He must have taken you upstairs and then come back down. The attic must have seemed a good temporary hiding place. What I can't understand is why he didn't remove the body later."

"He tried," she answered, "when he went back in September. But he couldn't bring himself to do it. I expect it was pretty awful by then, and he lost his nerve. That's what he said, anyway. He knew he'd have to do it before Christmas, but then he was called away, and Grandmother went up to the attic early. . . ."

"I see," said Bethancourt. "Of course, you knew nothing of that. He would have been careful to keep it from you."

She nodded slowly. "He wrote me about it before he—before he killed himself."

Bethancourt sighed. "Then there's only one thing more," he said. "That night, after your father took you upstairs and then came back down, what did he do?"

She stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"Did he confront Renaud and stab him? Or did he merely remove the knife that was already there and hide the body, so that no one would ever know what his beloved daughter had done or what had happened to

her to make her do it."

There was a long pause. Maureen raised her eyes to gaze at him levelly, the tears still wet on her face. Then she lifted her chin, and said, "I loved my father very much. He died so that this murder would never be connected with me. I will not make his sacrifice useless. He killed Renaud Fibrier. Renaud raped me, and my father killed him for it. That is what happened."

"I understand," said Bethancourt. "Thank you for talking with me." He rose and reached for his overcoat. In silence, she accompanied him to the door. He paused there for a moment, thoughtfully drawing on his gloves.

"Does your mother know you were raped?" he asked.

She shook her head violently. "No one knows."

"It's a horrible thing," he said. "Sometimes it can be very difficult to deal with. If you ever need to talk about it, well, my number's in the phone directory."

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you very much."

Outside it was still raining. Cerberus stepped over a puddle and bent to sniff the base of the lamp post. Bethancourt stood for a moment, watching the rainfall in the light from the street lamp. Then he sighed and looked at his watch.

"A bad business, old thing," he said to the dog. "Sometimes I wonder what I do it for. Come on then, Cerberus, it's time to meet Marla and give her Christmas present to her."

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# UNSOLVED

by Raymond  
Smullyan

*Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?*

*The answer will appear in the February issue.*

... "And now, we come to the more interesting cases," said the King.

Alice was all ears.

"Well," began the King, "in this trial we again have three defendants—A, B, C. The court knew that one was a knight, one a knave, and the other the spy, but it was not known who was which. First A accused B of being the spy; then B accused C of being the spy; and then C pointed to one of the other two defendants and said, 'He is really the spy!' The judge then convicted the spy. Which one did he convict?"

"Now, just a minute," cried Alice. "You don't expect me to solve this without your telling me which one C pointed to, do you?"

"When I read this case in the book," replied the King, "I also thought that not enough information was given to solve it. But when I thought a bit more deeply about it, I realized there was. Yes, enough information *has* been given to determine the solution."

Which one was the spy?

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See page 136 for the solution to the Mid-December puzzle.

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FICTION

# There Are Fantasies in the Park

by Marion M. Markham

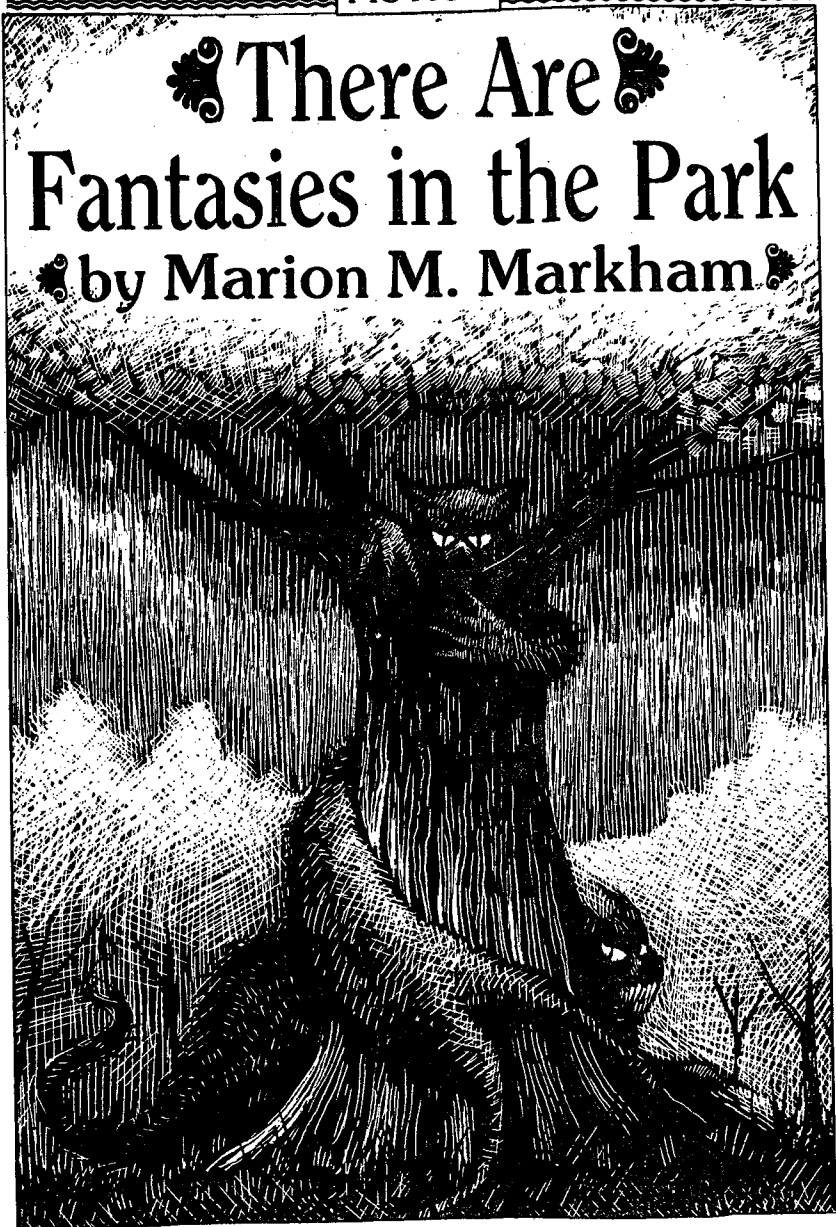


Illustration by Timothy Foley

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I hear police sirens. The sound gives me a funny feeling in my tummy. I know they are going to the park where it is dark and scary.

There are fantasies in the park. I have seen them sleeping in the trees. They look so funny. Sometimes they lie on their backs, and I can see the shaggy white fur on their tummies. Sometimes they lean their chins in the places where two branches meet, and I see how large their jaws are.

The fantasy I like best sleeps up close to the tree trunk. He curves his body around the trunk and puts his legs over the branches to keep from falling. I call him Tibby. I don't know his real name. He has a long shaggy mane, and when he sleeps with his mouth open, his tongue is bright red—like blood. I think he must have asthma because sometimes he makes funny noises when he breathes, the way Daddy does.

"See, there's one," I told my sister.

"One what?" she asked, though she never stopped walking.

"A fantasy." I pointed up into the big dead oak tree. "You can see it really plain 'cause there aren't any leaves in the way. Look, Donna. Please look, just this once."

She grabbed my elbow so hard it hurt.

"I haven't time for your baby games."

When she said that, the fantasy yawned. I saw the long sharp teeth, and I was glad Donna wasn't looking. She would be scared. Then the fantasy growled softly, so softly that even I could hardly hear it. I knew the growl wasn't meant for me, because Tibby was my friend.

At first I thought the fantasies were lions asleep in the trees. I told my kindergarten teacher about the lions in the park. She told me about a Cheshire Cat that faded away, but sometimes it left its grin behind. A man named Lewis something saw it and wrote a story about it. I think she said his name was Lewis Harold. But then she said it wasn't his real name anyway, just the name he put on the story. And she said the cat was a fantasy.

The lions in the park never fade while I'm watching. Maybe Tibby would, if he knew that's what fantasies are supposed to do. Or maybe the man who wrote the story only saw the grin, even though the rest of the cat was there. Sometimes I don't notice anything but Tibby's sharp teeth. They made me shiver until I knew that he was my friend.

He always watched my sister and me through large, half-open

eyes. Once he winked. But I've never seen him grin.

My sister never saw Tibby at all. At first I thought she was saying that to get me mad. She liked to make me so mad that I cried—except when Daddy was around. Donna never made me cry if Daddy was around. When we were alone, though, she teased me or pinched me until I screamed. Donna was eight years old when I was born, and she was used to playing with her toys all alone and never having to share her candy. She didn't like to share with a little brother.

I stopped talking about the lions. She didn't see them, so she thought I was making them up anyway. I don't know why she couldn't see how pretty they were—all golden in the morning sun. But she didn't. So I didn't say anything more—unless she got too close to one of them.

Tibby and the other lions didn't like my sister much. I warned her when she got near a tree where one was sleeping. Then she teased me about seeing things that weren't there. That's why I stopped calling them lions. She didn't tease if I said she was getting too near one of my fantasies. Sometimes she even laughed. I didn't like to have her laugh at me and my friends.

If we went to the park real late, the lions were gone. I don't think they went very far. They must have had a hidey-hole. It couldn't have been far away, though, because they could see when Donna made me cry. Then I would hear them howl.

She said she didn't hear them. But she always said she didn't hear Daddy if he told her to take me with her when she was going somewhere. I knew she heard him, but she didn't want me around. Sometimes I'd cry when she left me home, and then Daddy would punish her. I liked that.

Since school started, I haven't seen the lions so much. My sister had to be on the corner very early for the yellow bus, so she couldn't take me to the park in the morning. I go to afternoon kindergarten, and after school, she picked me up and we rode home together on the bus. Sometimes we got off and took the shortcut home through the park. When red and orange leaves began falling from the trees, the lions didn't sleep in them any more. I guess they were in their hidey-hole.

Once when we got off the bus, I saw Tibby and his wife with their cub hiding in the bushes along the path. Or maybe it was just shadows I saw, because it was getting dark earlier and earlier and even I was a little scared to walk that way.



Today on the bus I told my sister what my teacher said about the fantasy that faded to a grin. Donna made fun of me and said I didn't understand what my teacher meant. She's the one who didn't understand. A fantasy is something one person can see that another can't. The Cheshire Cat was a fantasy because the man with the two first names could see only the grin most of the time, and no one else ever saw any of it at all.

Why can't anyone understand that just because they don't see things the same doesn't mean those things aren't real?

As we got off the bus to walk through the park she pinched my shoulder hard and said, "I suppose your fantasy lion is waiting to pounce on us right now."

"Not us," I said. "You."

After I heard the sirens, two policemen in blue uniforms with shiny buttons came to our house. I told them about the lions with the sharp teeth and how I warned my sister not to get too close to them. I said the lions didn't like her being so mean to me. The policemen didn't understand. They kept saying they didn't know who had slashed my sister, but they were going to keep on looking. I guess they've never seen fantasies either.

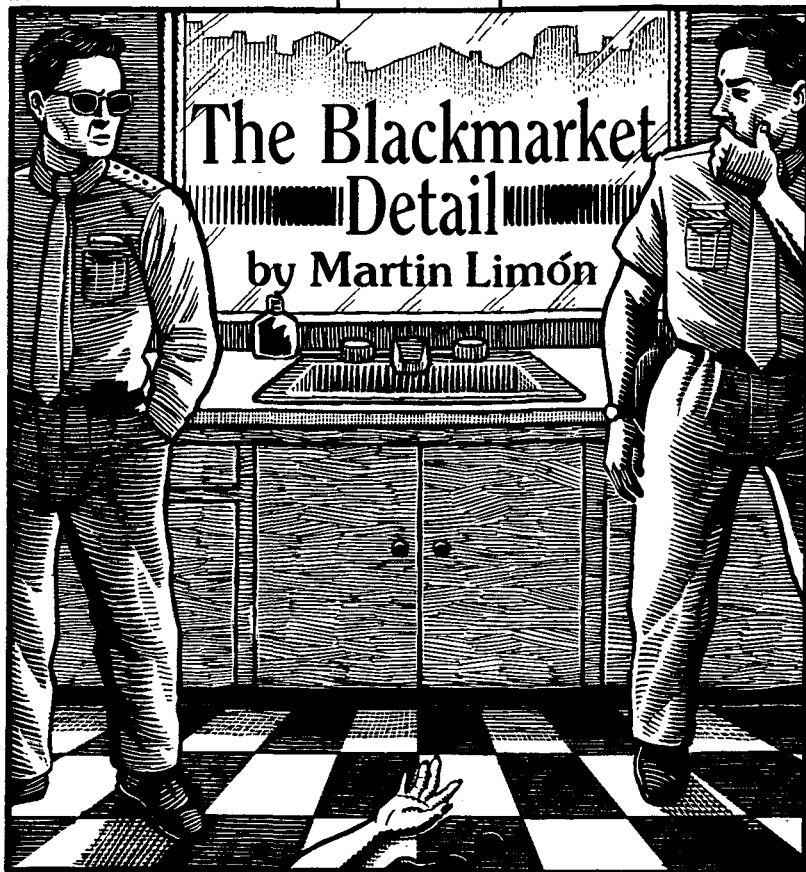
One of them called me a goofy kid. I hope Tibby heard him.

My mother cried a lot and didn't like me talking about the lions. She got awful upset and sent me to my room. She even gave me a push 'cause I didn't go fast enough. Sometimes she's just like my sister.

Now that my sister is dead, I probably won't get to the park very much. I'll miss Tibby. But maybe he isn't in the park any more. Maybe the sirens scared him, and he took his wife and cub and ran away.

Lately I've noticed that there are fantasies in our house. They're sort of like spiders except that they're white and fuzzy with big red eyes that look in every direction at once. They're awful small, and sometimes even I can hardly see them. But I'll bet if I think about them hard enough they'll grow big. As big as the lions in the park. And then my mother will have to be careful about being mean to me.

I bet fantasy spiders kill mean mothers.



# The Blackmarket Detail

by Martin Limón

A full-length dress clung to the soft, round parts of her short body like cellophane on a peach.

"Looks like we've found our culprit," Ernie said.

We'd been sitting in the parking lot of the Yongsan Commissary for about thirty minutes, sipping acidic coffee, watching the housewives parade in and out, trying to decide

which one to pinch for black-market activities.

None of them had been good-looking enough. Until now. She pushed her overflowing shopping cart towards the taxi stand and smiled at the bright spring day. A voluptuous Oriental doll come to life.

"Instant coffee, strawberry jam, a case of oranges, about twenty pounds of bananas. Is

she blackmarketing or what?"

"Either that or she's got a pet gorilla."

The bag boy helped load her booty into the trunk of the big PX taxi. The driver closed the door for her as she got in the back seat, ran around, and started the engine.

Ernie tossed his Styrofoam cup onto the pavement and choked the old motor pool Jeep to life. He slammed the gear shift into low, we jerked forward, and I barely managed to keep what was left of my coffee from splashing all over the front of my coat and tie.

Shadowing hardened criminals is never easy.

Ernie slid expertly through the busy afternoon Seoul traffic and stayed within a few yards of the cab. In Itaewon the cabbie turned left, ran the big Ford up a steep hill through a walled residential area, and took a quick right. Ernie waited at the base of the hill until he was out of sight and then, the sturdy old engine whining all the way, charged up after him. At the corner he turned off the Jeep and wedged us up against a stone wall.

I got out and peered around the corner. The cab driver was helping her unload the groceries. I went back to the Jeep and waited.

Most Korean wives of GI's will finish their blackmarket

activities in the afternoon before their husbands get home from work. They don't want to jeopardize his military career by getting caught selling a few jars of mayonnaise and maraschino cherries for twice what they paid for them in the commissary. Sometimes the husbands are a little squeamish about the whole thing, but most of them like the extra income just as much as their wives do. An extra four or five hundred dollars a month. Easy. And if they get serious, go for the big ticket items—TV's, microwaves, VCR's—they can make as much as fifty thousand dollars during a one year tour.

My name is George Sueño, U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division. My partner Ernie Bascom and I usually get stuck with the blackmarket detail. Our job is to bust housewives, embarrass their husbands, and cut back on the flow of duty-free goods from the U.S. bases to the Korean economy.

So far we'd managed to keep the deluge down to about a couple million dollars a week. Exactly what it had always been.

The cab driver finished unloading the groceries, accepted his tip with both hands, bowed, and in a few seconds the walled street was empty and quiet.

Ernie and I walked by her front gate. Stopped. Listened. Nothing I could make out.

Down about fifteen yards on the other side of the road was a small neighborhood store, fronted by an ice cream freezer and a couple of rickety metal tables under an awning emblazoned with the Oriental Beer logo. We rummaged around, Ernie bought some gum, and the old woman smiled as she came up with two paper cups to go with the liter of beer we bought. We sat outside, under the awning, and waited.

Spring was becoming summer in Korea and the afternoon was clear and bright but not hot. It reminded me of the endless days of sunshine I'd survived in foster homes throughout East L.A. The sun had been as glaring and unrelenting as the gaze of the adults I'd been forced to live with. I'd cursed my mother for dying and my father for disappearing into the bottomless pit south of the border.

It hadn't all been grim, though. One of my foster parents, Mrs. Aaronson, made sure I brought my schoolbooks home and then took the time to correct my homework. She showed me that arithmetic and spelling and science are all puzzles. Games. The greatest games. And as I lost myself in these games for hours, I looked forward, for the first time in my life, to being praised by the teacher and respected by the

other children for something besides my fists.

The first payoff was when I joined the army and my high test scores got me a clerical job—on the other side of the pond. As time went by, the clerks on the left of me and the clerks on the right of me got sent off to Vietnam. With only a year more to go on my enlistment, orders came down for Korea. I couldn't believe my luck. After a quick "Kimchi Orientation" from a couple of old sergeants who'd been there before, I was strapped into my first jet airplane and sent on my way.

I loved the seasons. A short tropical summer and snow-covered frigid winter. In between came the blossoming of spring and the long, slow, red and yellow dying of autumn.

East L.A. had been asphalt and heat and smog. All year long.

After I got my discharge, I went to L.A. City College on the GI Bill, but before the second semester had a chance to get started, I dropped out and re-enlisted in the army. But now I was a college boy and after a brief stint in the military police I found myself graduating from the Criminal Investigation School—and on my way back to Korea.

Ernie and I had gravitated together somehow. The two duds

of the CID Detachment. The first sergeant kept us together mainly to keep an eye on us. We both had this bad habit of following an investigation through even after the right slots had been filled in the provost marshal's statistical charts. They wanted a body count of GI's caught selling coffee in the village—not a report on how it was a customs violation for a general's wife to ship Korean antiques back to the States at government expense and then sell them at a three hundred percent profit.

There was no briefing chart for that.

By all rights Ernie should have been in Georgetown trying to pass the bar exam or working his way up through the ranks of young stockbrokers on Wall Street. His dad was a big honcho somewhere in the government, and Ernie's younger brothers were busy back home piling one degree upon the other. But for Ernie, Vietnam had interrupted everybody's plans.

After the girls and the madness and the unrelenting adrenaline rush of life in Vietnam, Ernie'd been transferred back to Fort Hood, Texas. He'd spent a couple of months gutting it out but finally couldn't take the humdrum existence and volunteered for another tour in Vietnam.

Most people would blame his

choices on the horse. But I knew him better than that. It was the loathing of routine, of predictability, that had caused him to reject a life of seeking riches in the States and caused him to reenlist in the army. And besides he'd put down the heroin now—you couldn't buy it in Korea anyway—and replaced it with the duty-free, shipped-at-taxpayer-expense, happy-hour-priced booze, that gushed from the army warehouses like crude from a grounded oil tanker.

A Korean man wearing sandals, a T-shirt, and loose-fitting gray work pants rode past us on a sturdy old bicycle.

Ernie elbowed me. "Must be the pickup, pal."

The produce displays kept the man from seeing us, and Ernie and I got up, taking our beer with us, and faded deeper into the darkness of the grocery store.

The man parked his bicycle in front of the doll's front gate and rang the bell. In less than a minute the door opened and the man went through, carrying some flattened cardboard boxes and some string.

We sat back down and finished our beer. Ready for action.

A rag dealer pushing a wooden cart on oversized bicycle tires rolled past us. He clanged his big rusty metal shears and wailed something

incomprehensible to his prospective customers. A woman down the street, across from the doll's house, came out from behind her big metal gate and bartered with the rag dealer for a while, finally selling him a brown paper bag filled with flattened aluminum cans.

The Koreans have been recycling for centuries.

The rag dealer tried to interest her in some bits of clothing he held up for her but she shook her head and demanded money instead. A few coins changed hands, the woman went back behind her protective walls, and the rag dealer clanged down the road, turned left, and was out of sight.

In the distance his clanging and wailing stopped for a while and I figured he must have found another customer.

The man on the bicycle reappeared carrying two large cardboard boxes wrapped in string. He struggled beneath their weight but managed to hoist them up onto the heavy-duty stand on the back of his bicycle. He secured the boxes with rope, hopped on the bike, and rode off. The gate behind him had long since been closed.

"Let's go, pal." Ernie and I trotted down the hill after him, and then jumped in our Jeep and followed at a safe distance as he crossed the Main Supply Route and went about a half

mile farther into the heart of Itaewon.

A steep alley turned up a hill, and the man jumped off his bicycle and pushed it slowly up the incline. Ernie pulled over, and I got out of the Jeep. I followed the man to the top of the hill and down a couple of alleys, and watched as he parked in front of a small house surrounded by a rickety old wooden fence. He unloaded his boxes and entered. Then he took his bicycle in and closed the gate.

On the way back to the Jeep I stopped at a public phone and called the Korean National Police liaison officer.

By the time I got back to where Ernie was waiting, a small blue and white Korean police car was just pulling up. Two uniformed KNP's got out, and the four of us walked up into the catacombs of the Korean working class neighborhood.

They kicked the door in. In about ten seconds the man was face down on the floor of his home, his wrists handcuffed securely behind him. Some of the fruit was smashed and the U.S. made canned goods rolled slowly across the small room. They took him to the Itaewon police box.

Ernie and I popped back to the doll's house and knocked on the door. There was no answer. We waited for a while and then

a GI sauntered towards us carrying a briefcase. He was tall and thin, with a pencil-line mustache and the strut of a Southern aristocrat.

The insignia on his neatly pressed khaki uniform identified him as Chief Warrant Officer Three Janson. Medical Corps.

"What do you want?"

I flashed my badge. "To question your wife concerning blackmarket activities."

"No way."

Janson opened the door and told us to wait, but it didn't take long because we barged in when we heard his scream.

The voluptuous Oriental doll lay dead on the floor, blood seeping from a hole in her side where her ribs should have been.

**T**he big red brick building that was the headquarters of the CID detachment seemed to be waiting to swallow us as we approached.

The first sergeant wasn't in his office, but down in the admin section barking into telephones and ripping off teletype reports.

"What the hell happened with you guys?" he said when he noticed us. "I send you on a simple blackmarket detail, and you turn up with a corpse."

Ernie sat down on the edge

of Miss Kim's desk and offered her a stick of gum. She smiled and accepted a piece with her long manicured fingernails.

"Bascom! Get down to my office! You too, Sueño!"

The asschewing was royal. You would've thought we killed the girl ourselves, and in a way that's sort of what he said. At least we'd been in the vicinity and had the opportunity—if not the motive. He told us that if she'd been raped we'd probably have been charged and locked up by now.

Shows you the high opinion our leadership has of us.

He'd given the case to Burrows and Slabem, affectionately known around the office as the Boot Hill Brothers, his favorite investigators when it came to burying inconvenient facts. When the dependent of a U.S. serviceman gets murdered, all hell breaks loose up at the Eighth Army Headquarters. Colonel Stoneheart, our provost marshal, was briefing the commanding general right now. The first sergeant felt that only a trustworthy pair of sleuths like Burrows and Slabem could properly handle the case.

"You mean properly cover it up," Ernie said.

The first sergeant freaked, chasing us out of his office and warning us to stay off the case unless Burrows and Slabem had



some questions for us that weren't covered in our initial reports.

We wandered down the long hallway.

"What would we do without the first sergeant's hoarse voice echoing down the halls?"

"I wouldn't know how to act."

Ernie winked at Miss Kim on the way out, and we jumped in his Jeep and went directly to the Itaewon police box.

Exactly what the first sergeant had told us not to do.

Burrows and Slabem were there. Burrows, tall and skinny with a pockmarked face, Slabem, short and round with a pimply face. The Korean police wouldn't talk to them. Neither would we. They harrumphed and tried to look officious. Chins met necks. Except in Slabem's case.

I greeted Captain Kim, commander of the Itaewon police box, and spoke to him in his own language.

"Were you told anything by the offender?"

"Yes. He told us everything."

"How did you get his confession so quickly?"

Captain Kim slammed his fist into his cupped hand. "The lie detector."

He ushered us back to the cells and the guy on the bicycle lay on a moist cement floor. I recognized him because of his

clothes. His face was a puffed hive of purple welts.

Burrows and Slabem, the Boot Hill Brothers, glared at us as we walked out. Somehow I didn't think they'd keep our little visit a secret from the first sergeant.

We talked to a lot of the folks in the neighborhood, covering much of the same ground the Korean police had already covered. The only thing unusual anyone had noticed was me and Ernie hanging around. The man on the bicycle had been conducting blackmarket business with the GI wife in the neighborhood for many months, without incident as far as anyone knew.

The whole thing was a mystery to me. Why would a blackmarketeer kill one of his sources of income?

Ernie thought it might have been Janson. Husbands are always a first suspect in a murder case. But we checked the back of the building. The walls were ten feet high, sheer, and studded with shards of glass embedded in cement on the top. When we had seen Janson, his uniform was still neat, with no more wear than one would expect from a hard day's work at the office.

We couldn't interrogate him, though. Burrows and Slabem would be handling that. On

compound. In conjunction with the chaplain who was giving him counseling and trying to pull him through this crisis.

"Might as well forget it," Ernie said. "If it wasn't the black-market guy, Burrows and Slabem might figure out who it was. And anyway the first sergeant said to stay off the case. We're potential suspects. Nothing we can do about it."

But we both knew what was at stake. The guys who played everything by the regulations considered us a couple of screw-offs anyway. And a young woman, a U.S. army dependent, had been murdered while we were actually staking out her home. We both planned a long career in the army, probably in the CID, and I wasn't going to walk into one assignment after another with the stigma of an unsolved murder, one that happened right under my nose, hanging around my neck.

"We got to find out who killed her," I said.

Ernie shrugged.

We went back to the compound and started making some phone calls. Calling in every favor we had out there. Tracking Janson.

**S**omehow all our investigations seem to lead us directly to the Itaewon nightclub district.

In this case we found out that Janson was the chief inspector for the Preventive Medicine division. They're the guys who give the mess sergeants and the Officer's Club managers a hard time about the cleanliness of their kitchens, the temperatures of their food storage facilities, stuff like that.

Janson's NCO-in-charge, the guy who actually ran the operation, was Sergeant First Class Billings. Billings was sort of a soft guy; I'd seen him before at the NCO Club. A little out of shape. Never with a woman. Suspect. And he always puffed on his scroags through a cigarette holder.

Word was that he was a real brown-noser. His boss, Chief Janson, or anybody else up the chain of command, could do no wrong as far as he was concerned. The privates who worked for him, though, couldn't do anything right, and he made their lives miserable. Much to the pleasure of Chief Janson, who felt that suffering subordinates meant a well-run ship.

Captain Bligh in khaki.

Sergeant Billings' desire to please his superiors extended beyond the working day, and we had heard from one of his cronies that Billings and Chief Janson regularly ran the village of Itaewon together. The guy had heard Billings mention the Spider Lady Club, a little

hole-in-the-wall amongst the bigger, gaudier nightclubs, as their favorite hangout.

Ernie and I had changed into our running the ville outfits: sneakers, blue jeans, and a nylon jacket with a golden dragon embroidered on the back. It was nighttime and we were in the Spider Lady Club, having a welcome cold one and checking out the exceptionally attractive ladies. The music was mellow and the place was lit by red lamps and the flickering blue light from a row of tropical aquariums.

"Janson's got good taste," Ernie said. "First his late wife and now this joint."

"Living his life to the full."

After about twenty minutes, Billings walked in, which didn't surprise us much but what did surprise us was the guy he had in tow. Chief Janson.

We were at a table in a dark corner; my back was to them, and Ernie adjusted his seat so his face couldn't be easily seen from where they sat at the bar.

"Looks like the chaplain's counseling has done wonders for Janson," Ernie said.

I heard their laughter as the excited barmaids brought them their drinks without their having to order. Regulars. Through the smoke-covered mirror on the back wall I made out the smiling woman who leaned over to serve Janson. She was tall,

thin, and elegant. Gorgeous, all in all. Black hair billowed around her pale, heart-shaped face. Her eyes slanted up, painted heavily with shadow.

The Spider Lady.

Ernie had checked with one of the girls earlier and gotten her story. She owned the joint, having apparently gotten the initial capital outlay from working as a nurse. Some of the girls claimed it didn't come so much from her salary but from making some extracurricular arrangements with a few of the doctors. On a cash basis.

That would explain her infatuation with the white-coated types who worked in the Preventive Medicine division.

I wondered if she knew that Janson was actually a veterinarian—a horse doctor. But maybe it was just the rubber gloves that turned her on.

Could this be it? Could it be as simple as Janson's wanting to break free from his present old lady to hook up with the Spider Lady? We waited until Janson walked into the latrine and Billings was deep in conversation with one of the Spider Lady's girls and we slipped out of the club.

We walked into the crisp night air of Itaewon, rejected two propositions, and sauntered down the hill towards our favorite beer hall.

"We got the motive," Ernie

said. "All we got to do is find the opportunity."

The big beer hall was on the outskirts of Itaewon. We drank draft beer, rubbed elbows with the Korean working men, and bantered with the big rotund Mongolian woman who slammed down frothing mugs in front of us.

All I could think about was the small Oriental doll and how she had looked with that bloody gash beneath her breast.

**I**n the morning we slipped out of the office as early as we could, supposedly on our way to pump up Colonel Stoneheart's blackmarket arrest statistics but actually on our way to see Captain Kim and get the key to Janson's house. It went smooth. Captain Kim liked the way we didn't try to revamp four thousand years of Korean culture every time we ran into a procedure we didn't approve of. He gave us the key.

The first sergeant would have had a fit if he'd known we were entering the restricted premises of a murder site. But we didn't plan on telling him.

Janson had moved most of his stuff out and was staying in officers' quarters on the base.

White tape in the shape of a small woman surrounded a caked blot of blood. The Korean police usually use tape instead of chalk since it's sort of hard

to make a good outline of the victim with chalk on vinyl floors that are heated from below by hot-air ducts. The floor we walked on in our stocking feet was cold now.

We surveyed the entire apartment. It was just a one bedroom job with a small kitchen and a cement-floored bathroom. There was no beer in the refrigerator.

Metal clanged and I heard an old man wailing for his life.

The rag dealer.

We put our shoes back on and hurried out to stop the old man and ask if he'd seen anything unusual yesterday afternoon.

I greeted him in Korean. "*Anyonghaseiyo.*"

The old man halted his cart, smiled, and his leathery brown face folded into so many neat rows that I almost thought I heard it crinkle. He kept his mouth open and didn't seem to know what to say. Talking to Americans wasn't exactly an everyday occurrence for him. Folks in the UFO society probably have more conversations with aliens.

"Yesterday," I said, "we were sitting in that store over there when you came by."

The old man nodded. "Yes. I saw you."

"You bought some aluminum cans from this woman in this house here."

"Yes yes. That's right."

"And then you went around the corner, down the hill."

"Yes."

"Did you notice anything unusual?"

"Unusual?"

"Yes. Did you see any American people in the neighborhood?"

"No. I saw no American people. The Korean police already asked me that. Look, I am an old man and I have to support myself and an old sick wife. Do you want to buy something?"

"No. We don't want to buy anything."

We went back into the house and the old man trundled his cart down the road, clanging his metal shears and wailing his plaintive song.

We searched the grounds, passing through a narrow passageway that ran between the side of the apartment and the big sandstone brick wall that separated the building from the two story house next door. Out back, a small cement-floored courtyard sat behind Janson's apartment and the landlord's apartment next door. It was enclosed by the big ten foot masonry wall topped with the shards of glass.

The entire complex was on a corner, formed by the alley that ran up the steep hill we had originally come up in our Jeep and the street that ran in front of the little store from which we

had conducted our surveillance.

The only way for someone to enter this house while we were watching from the store was over the back walls, which seemed unlikely since they faced other people's residences, or over this ten foot stone wall which faced the public street. We had already checked the other side and it was sheer and very difficult to climb. But the inside of the wall was not as high, since the level of the back courtyard was higher than the street by a couple of feet. It also provided a number of footholds, from a clinging vine and from some protruding rocks imbedded in the wall.

The wall had been designed to keep out intruders. From inside it could be easily climbed.

So I climbed it. Ernie stayed on the ground, clicking his gum and telling me—sarcastically, I think—to be careful.

The tricky part about the climb was the handholds on the top of the wall, since you had to be careful to grab a spot between the randomly spaced shards of glass. If you were in a hurry you'd cut yourself for sure.

The jump down into the street would be a little rough also, although not impossible. About twelve or fourteen feet, depending on which part of the rapidly descending pavement you landed on. An airborne trooper,

with a good hit and roll, would have no trouble with it.

As I gazed over the wall and out into the street, I noticed something fluttering in the gentle breeze. It was blue and stuck to the base of one of the shards of glass. Fiber. Wool maybe. A clump of it. I reached out and pulled the material off the jagged edge of the glass. It was soft and blue. Baby blue.

It didn't look worn. It looked sort of new, but it would be impossible to tell much about it without a lab analysis and that would be sort of difficult since I wasn't officially on the case. And anyway the lab was in Toyko. Before a packet could be sent there it had to be approved by the first sergeant.

So much for high technology. I fell back on my meager allotment of common sense.

It looked like threads from a woman's sweater. Maybe a woman climbed this fence and got part of her clothing caught on these jagged shards of glass. It would be easy, of course, with a ladder, but the Korean police had already interviewed everyone in the neighborhood and no one had seen any workmen or anyone setting up any sort of apparatus.

I climbed down and showed the fiber to Ernie.

He thought for a while and then he said, "The problem is how did she get over the wall?"

It would have to be something that would give her a lift without causing any particular notice from the neighbors. Trashcans maybe?"

That was it. "Or a trash cart."

Ernie and I ran outside and scoured the neighborhood until we found the old rag dealer.

"Yesterday, when you rounded the corner away from the store, you stopped calling and clanging your shears for a while. You had a customer."

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"A beautiful young lady. Very tall. Very fancy." The old man slashed his fingertips across his eyes and up. "She locked herself out of her house."

"So she had to climb the wall?"

"Yes. I rolled my cart over and tilted it up. She climbed over easily."

"And then what?"

"And then I went about my business." The old man looked at the ground, shaking his head slightly. "But she was a very strange woman. Later, down at the bottom of the hill, I saw her again. She was all out of breath from her climb and she had torn her sweater."

"Her sweater? What color was it?"

The old man reached under some stacks of cardboard. "Here. She sold it to me, cheap, because it had been torn. My wife

repaired it, and it looks just fine now. I should be able to sell it for a good price."

The old man held it up to us, and I reached into my pocket for my small wad of Korean bills.

It was soft and fluffy and baby blue.

Since the Spider Lady was a Korean citizen and therefore not under our jurisdiction, we contacted Captain Kim and had him go along with us to make the pinch.

She was behind the bar of the Spider Lady Club, just getting ready for the evening's business, laughing and joking with the other girls.

Ernie and I came in the door first, wearing our coats and ties, and when she saw Captain Kim behind us and the blue sweater in my hand, the exquisite lines of her face sagged and her narrow eyes focused on me, like arrows held taut in a bow. Blood drained from her skin, and she stood stock-still for a moment. Thinking.

Then she reached under the bar and pulled out a long glistening paring knife, and as her girlfriends chattered away she kept her eyes on me and pulled the point of the blade straight down the flesh of her forearm.

She kept pulling and ripping until finally the other girls realized what was going on and by the time we got to her, her arm was a shredded mess.

Her nurse training had come in handy because she knew that stitches weren't likely to close arteries that had been cut lengthwise. We applied a tourniquet, but somehow she managed to let it loose while she was in the ambulance and, turning her back to the attendant, kept her secret long enough to do what she wanted to do: die.

Janson was put on the first flight out of the country by order of the commanding general, his personal effects packed and shipped to him later.

Billings spent a lot of time at the NCO Club, restricted to post. He spun romantic tales about his two friends and what he saw as their self-sacrificing love.

The girls at the Spider Lady Club told us the truth. About how proud the Spider Lady had been to be marrying a doctor.

Through it all, from bar to bar, all I could think about was the doll-like woman with the nice curves.

Whose smile had been filled with life.





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YTSM-6

# The Game of the Name

by Sybil Baker



**T**he long table gleamed, on that fateful night in 1887, like an oasis of comfort, nay, of a higher degree of happiness than that: the contended anticipation that precedes satisfaction of the highest order.

None of the five guests, all of them men, was an intimate of the host, who was generally perceived as rather distant and eccentric. All however—albeit not in some months—had dined at the mansion on one occasion or another, and had dined out for weeks thereafter on their tales concerning the meal. The host was blessed with the most estimable cook in all of Surrey, a comely woman named Lucie:

Her specialty was succulent surprises. Magically spiced croutons sailed in her soups; edible blossoms from the mansion's gardens nestled among the peas; a cut of tender beef or mutton would be cradled in the lightest pastry, so that a single bite of one of Lucie's creations yielded dozens of tastes and textures. Such cooking is like music—and yet not so, this being the distinction: A symphony can evoke images and memories of the nursery, of manly victory at duel, of a tremulous walk in the woods with one's first shy sweetheart, of an exotic foreign marketplace in the company of an alien and alluring stranger; but unlike the passages of music, which succeed and supplant one another, in one bite of Lucie's dishes all was simultaneous. Nanny, Nature, Glory, Exotica, Erotica, blending, then disparate, then blending again.

June that year had been thoroughly unpredictable, devilishly hot one week and blustery the next. This particular night it was as if a stray autumn storm had gripped the land. Yet in the host's dining room, hearth demonstrated its power over heath. Let the wind howl through the black night outside, here crystal and silverware reflected only the dancing candlelight. Let the driving rain without bend the trees; here, in silver bowls bearing the host's coat of arms, the fragrance of roses, carnations, and jasmine from the mansion's stately garden told of exquisite days in the past, exquisite green days to come once the fury beyond the windowpanes exhausted itself. In fact, if so much as a drop from the raging rain had somehow been able to hurl itself through the leaded windows onto that long gloss of mahogany tabletop, it would have curled up like a contented kitten.

The host had requested the pleasure of the assembled company "to discuss a matter that could contain grave import for them all," or so the invitation stated. Several of the guests had been similarly approached in the past—if not so formally—on some business venture, and had learned that their host's inclination in such matters ran to the grandiose. And yet their curiosity had been piqued; and yet, there was always Lucie's cooking.

Now their host surveyed the table, drinking in each particle of glow and sparkle, as the gentlemen stood about the room. Then, with a sigh and a faint smile, he asked them to be seated and heaved himself into place at the head of the table. This host, it should be explained, no doubt because of Lucie's expertise and imagination over the past decade, could have passed for a host of hosts rather than one, he was so extraordinarily huge both in height and girth.

Yet his voice was silken. "Well, John," he said, looking at no one in particular, "is there anything more pleasant than to be inside when the outside turns itself upside down?"

The party was immediately thrown into confusion. Astonishment, discomfiture, or embarrassment at their host's lapse—addressing them by their Christian name, as if they were servants or children—now caused a simultaneous response, each guest's words tumbling over those of the others.

Little John Moleson, his small brow puckered above a trembling smile, cried heartily, "Just so, indeed!" A softhearted man of middle age, his hair was still so thick and black it looked as if it could repel water, and this, combined with a sharp pointed nose and a rather worried alertness, indeed gave the impression of some water animal. Yet he suffered from a paucity of confidence, and now his host's impudence caused him to wonder if some pleasantry on his own part had fallen on his host's ears amiss. Nay, when they had passed in the square a fortnight ago, it had been a mild enough "Good day, Mr. Moleson!" Thus his mind darted this way and that, discovering naught.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" John Dunleavy remonstrated. Tall, lean, gray, and touchy, a loyal friend and an implacable enemy, he had arrived in a mood as black as the weather, so cruelly had the rain lashed the horses, so turbulently had the wind swayed the coach. Now he wished he had sent the stable boy with his regrets, as his wife had implored him to.

John Stout murmured, "Sir, our acquaintance hardly—" Reining in his words, he immediately blushed, and blushed anew at the thought that he was blushing. At a mere thirty-three years of age, Stout's general probity and intelligence had caused many a man, many years his senior, to approach him about holding high office in the county. He was as honest as the day was long, and an articulate and eloquent speaker, despite his frequent blushes in the process. But he was as fairminded as he was fairskinned, and if he so chose, would go far in the queen's service in some capacity, it was generally thought.

John Bartholomew, at twenty-six, the youngest gentleman there, simply opened his forget-me-not blue eyes wide and gazed at his host in open-mouthed astonishment, having been caught so thoroughly off guard that no words formed. Earlier he had asked the host if Lucie had happened to prepare her famous ptarmigan soup that evening, and had been assured that it led the menu. Thus, when the impertinence occurred, his mind had been on the soup,

a substance of such ineffable superiority that the very brain was apt to liquify at contemplation of the stuff.

Only one man suffered no discomfiture: jolly Sir John Huffwell, who had been deafened by a cannon in the Crimean War. "Sorry, old chap," he boomed, "I had my good ear to the weather. What was the question?"

The host remained as unconcerned as if he had placed a napkin on the table instead of sending a cannonball broadside into the gathering. His tiny slits of eyes, often as dull as two olive pits on a puffy pillow, glinted now as they moved from face to face. He licked his lips briefly before continuing. "I suppose you're wondering why I asked you all here tonight," he said.

"Actually, I'm wondering why I came tonight, if the truth be known," said Dunleavy.

Stout drew himself up. "Certainly you are not in the habit, sir, of selecting dinner companions by groupings of Christian names."

The other guests glanced at one another. That all bore the first name of John had not failed to strike them but then, depending on their temperaments, had either been brushed aside as another irritating situation traceable entirely to their parents' lack of imagination or, conversely, as a pleasant reassurance: say what you will, that one's first name was John was all the proof in the world that one fit in.

At last, then, the host offered the appropriate apologies, imploring all to bear with him, assuring each and all that his purpose would soon be made plain. A few moments later, however, the second unpleasant surprise of the evening occurred, when the manservant entered and began serving the ptarmigan soup.

Surely no ptarmigan had formed any part of this soup. Indeed, thought some among the company, no ptarmigan had so much as flown over the pot it boiled in—so wretched was the broth, with a vague taste of something resembling musty leather. As a shocked silence descended on the table, which made the howling wind and the pounding of the rain outside seem all the louder, the host observed them all closely.

After the first taste, John Bartholomew blew on his second spoonful as if he could breathe it back to life. John Moleson, good soul that he was, valiantly swallowed the watery concoction, spoonful by spoonful, and so did Sir John; John Dunleavy deliberately laid his spoon by his bowl after his first sip.

John Stout followed suit after three spoonfuls, putting one square hand palm down on the table. He had found that this, coupled with

planting his feet firmly on whatever surface supported them, sometimes helped him stay the blood from his countenance and keep his mind on the business at hand. "Excuse me, sir, but for the sake of that good woman's reputation, this cannot be Lucie's ptarmigan soup. Am I not—"

"You are correct," the host interrupted. "Lucie is—" he bowed his head as if to slide a belch into his collar, but when he raised his chin, his tears outshone the silverware. Dabbing his cheeks with his damask napkin, he went on. "Do you remember her beef Wellington? Do you remember the succulence of that beef, do you recall the pastry surrounding it, flaky and light as a gosling's feather? Do you remember her gooseberry pudding? Can you ever forget her gooseberry pudding?"

"But where is she?" demanded John Moleson in alarm. Lucie was not only the best cook in creation, but a cheerful woman who had the good grace to be even shorter than himself, and thus was one of his favorite servants among the household staffs of his acquaintances.

"Gone! Gone!" cried the host.

"I say, what rotten luck," Sir John commiserated. "There's no loyalty any more. These people get offered a better position, and they're off to the races without a backward glance."

"You don't understand," the host moaned. "She's dead. Murdered."

"Oh, I see." Sir John nodded contentedly. "I thought you said she was gone."

The other four men gasped as one. "By whom?" said John Bartholomew. "Murdered, you say?"

"By someone named John," said the host. "That name was the last word she uttered."

Again there was silence as the true reason for this peculiar dinner party gradually sank in. Now their host, in the worst possible taste, and directly after a soup of the worst possible taste, was implying that he thought one of them capable of murder.

Moleson stammered, "But why—on earth—would anyone—"

"Jealousy, sir," answered the host. "Covetousness."

"Unbelievable," announced John Dunleavy, fixing his host with a baleful glare. "What crust."

"As light as a gosling's feather," the host said, stifling a sob.

Dunleavy rose. "Come, gentlemen," he said. "If you think, sir, that we acquiesced to your invitation only to be insulted, you have another think coming."

"Yes, pray explain yourself, sir," young Bartholomew said. "I consider this a breach of every known standard of hospitality."

"I say," said poor old Sir John, misinterpreting the cause of the general umbrage, "granted, it was was not up to Lucie's standard, but anyone can have an off day."

"She didn't cook it," shouted Stout.

"No? Why not?"

"Because she's dead. Murdered, according to our host."

"Rotten luck, that," Sir John said, but whether or not he truly understood what was afoot was a mystery in itself.

Stout abandoned his attempts to communicate with the old warrior and turned toward the head of the table. "And I, for one, would like to know exactly what you know of this awful deed, sir."

"I am prepared, nay, eager, to relate all," said the host, and pulled the bell for the servant. Dunleavy and Bartholomew were still on their feet and Moleson had carefully placed his napkin next to his plate, about to rise.

Stout appealed to each of them in turn. "Eh? Eh? Would you not like to pursue this matter further, gentlemen?" Yet Dunleavy appeared sulky, and the other two undecided.

The host's mouth worked moistly. "I say," he said, "I mean to say, I know this is bad form and all. And even if your names were Tom, Dick, and Harry and all the rest of it, I've been meaning to ask you all, or any one of you, up for months now. I mean, if it hadn't been for this murder business."

He was saved from the general reaction to this facile and disingenuous contrition by the manservant's carrying in what appeared to be a decent roast beef, followed by a maid's bustling around with all sorts of side dishes that, although plain, at least appeared edible.

When the servants removed themselves again, the host continued, "And in fact, it is not that I could possibly presume to think that anyone here assembled could have had a hand in this, but merely, well, you know, the name, well, you see—" The host's excuses faltered to a stop, but then seemed to gain impetus by a sudden thought. "You know how it is when you have chanced to suffer some malady, perhaps a broken leg, and one tells one's acquaintances, and lo and behold, it appears that all at some time have suffered the selfsame malady, everyone has had a broken leg—and thus all being called John, I thought you might know of others similarly situated, whose names are John, that I might not know."



One or two of the guests grudgingly provided the name of another gentleman honored with the name of John: there was a solicitor by that name; there was a curate, someone said. In any case, the company was persuaded to reassemble at table, at least until their curiosity should be satisfied on this perturbing turn of events.

As the host told what had transpired, he glanced from face to face. "It was in the middle of the day, last weekend. I had come downstairs to inform Lucie of something or another when I found her bound to a chair and gagged out there in the pantry."

"Saucy wench," said Sir John, for no reason at all. Surmising from his companions' reactions that he was off the mark, he said no more, but let the host continue to recount the harrowing incident.

"Her eyes were closed. I think she was unconscious. I immediately removed the gag and began chafing her wrists. And within a moment she opened her eyes, and said, 'John,' and was obviously about to say the last name of her assailant when she lost consciousness again. And then, feeling her wrists, I detected no pulse and dashed out of the room to get help, and returned with Lawrence, my valet, and . . . and . . ." The host swallowed, made a helpless gesture, and shook his head.

"And what?" asked Bartholomew.

"And she was gone. Vanished."

"You say she was bound?" asked Stout. "Then how could she escape?"

"I say." Bartholomew's blue eyes widened. "Perhaps her assailant carried her off."

The host nodded. "Exactly. You see, if there is no body, it is hard to prove murder, is it not? Or so I was informed by the constabulary. And yet murder it was, I have no doubt," he said. "What they call involuntary homicide, I believe." The host, with no regard for manners, placed his beefy arms upon the table and leaned forward, his head moving from side to side with a lowering gaze. "Though I grant it might have been inadvertent. My theory is this," he said. "Whoever did this deed, I warrant, was intent merely on making Lucie his own . . ."

"Sir!" cried Bartholomew, "what are you implying?"

"In a culinary sense, of course," the host replied. "I believe her reputation may have been her undoing."

"And what reputation was that?" demanded Stout.

"You tasted her meals, her meats, her trifles, how can you ask?" the host said. "My meaning is that Lucie's attacker meant to kidnap

her and carry her hence to his own kitchen, but in the process frightened her so thoroughly that she expired."

"Nonsense," said Dunleavy. "No woman can cook in a strange kitchen."

"But, but—" sputtered Bartholomew. His head whipped in the direction of Dunleavy, since he wanted to refute that premise, but then whipped back to the host again on the current of a more pressing logic. "But if someone were to seek her employment, all he had to do was offer her better wages, sir."

"You are forgetting she was indentured," said the host.

"Then pay off her indentureship," Bartholomew cried.

The host shrugged.

Dunleavy glared at him. "I believe that several households hereabouts attempted that very point, and were refused."

Stung, the host responded hotly, "And would *you*, sir?" He beseeched them all righteously, "Would you? Would any man among us have accepted money for such a treasure as Lucie's talents?"

The gentlemen were silent, searching their consciences, and declining to commit themselves to an answer.

At last Moleson ventured, "But if the assailant meant to kidnap her, why not simply carry her off? Why tie her up?" His small nose seemed to sharpen further as he pursed his lips and looked round the table.

"Aye, why indeed bind her to a chair?" Bartholomew said.

"Unless some valuables were missing, to give the villain time to collect them," Stout observed.

"Ah," the host said, "all is safe in that particular. I checked every cupboard and cranny of the house." But then he gave a weak gasp and put his fingers to his lower lip, curling it down so that it showed most unpleasantly pink. "I beg your pardon," he muttered, and rose from his chair and stood there shuffling a moment, like a hanged man. "How stupid," he said, "how stupid of me." His hand rapidly tap-tapped a jowl, and he turned pale. "I have just be-thought a place I neglected. I beg your forgiveness, I will return directly." And without another word, he left the room in undulating haste.

"Well," said Dunleavy softly, and not without satisfaction, "methinks our host may find a great deal missing after all, eh?"

"Aye," said Bartholomew.

"Aye," Moleson said. "Poor woman. Poor Lucie, it is hard to realize, isn't it?" He poked at some shredded turnip morosely. "She was all alone in the world, you know."

Dunleavy said, "I thought she had a brother somewhere. I knew she was orphaned, but—"

"No, she was utterly alone in the world," Moleson said, "according to my manservant."

"Well, she was religious, I know that," Bartholomew said, and asked Sir John to pass the salt before he noticed that their low tones had apparently lulled the old soldier into nodding off, his head occasionally dipping and jerking up again over his plate. "Thank you, Mr. Stout. My cook said Lucie was of the habit of singing hymns as she baked."

"Is that so?" Stout said.

"Oh, yes," responded the young man. "'Onward Christian Soldiers' and all the rest of it, as she beat the batter, or whatever it's called, in time, you know."

"Well," said Stout, suitably impressed. "I grant I didn't know she was religious."

"Huh!" exploded Dunleavy. "More so than her master, I warrant. Have you ever been subjected to such hospitality?"

The expostulation barely saved Sir John's pate from his plate, and it lifted a notch, though no eye opened. "A trifle," he mumbled in his dreams.

Dunleavy was about to launch into an enumeration of his host's defects when that gentleman himself returned, panting and wringing his hands.

All gave the host elaborate attention as he told of a missing gold locket on a gold chain that had once belonged to his mother, and disarray among some other heirlooms of medium value, he said—yet the truly precious ones were undisturbed—"the ones in, um, well, elsewhere," he said, glancing around the table.

"No doubt the miscreant would have made off with those, too, given time," Stout said.

The company chewed at their food in silence. Dunleavy took out his watch and rudely held it at arm's length in the halo of a candle.

"Hah!" said the host. "Well, I suppose it could have been worse."

Stout made a cross with two string beans on his plate and resolutely placed his silverware across it. "I have been thinking," he said. "How could the assailant have had time to untie Lucie and carry her off in the time you were gone?"

"A point," Moleson said. "Moreover, if someone wanted her to employ her as a cook, and if she indeed swooned into death—oh, the blackguard!" Moleson paused. "I can't help but feel for her condition, as keenly as if she had been well-born, I may assure

you." He mastered the emotion that shook his narrow chest, and proceeded more steadily. "Then what use would she be to her attacker, in that case?"

"Granted, her death would render her unemployable," the host said callously. "But carrying off her person would have, as I have related—and has, indeed—confused the constabulary. I believe that was its purpose."

Dunleavy, who had been listening in sardonic silence, took a long drink of his wine. "Gentlemen, your charity astonishes me," he announced. "I for one am not inclined to unravel the complexities of a situation that is accompanied by such effrontery. Remember, sirs, under what conditions you guilelessly accepted this invitation, only to be thence cast under suspicion."

"True enough," Bartholomew said. "I would be interested in discovering what you hoped would be gained—did you think the culprit would betray himself at table?"

Stout gave a short laugh. "Perhaps, at the first taste of that obnoxious broth you bestowed on us, you expected the miscreant to confess all?"

"I explained, sir, that that was not the intent of my invitation."

Dunleavy snorted. "Well, allow me to exonerate myself and take my leave," he said. "What you have disregarded, sir," he said to the host, "is motive. In my case, I am happy to say that my Mary is as good a cook as Lucie on her best day. And by your leave, I would want no other."

The guests mulled over this proposition and let it pass. Mary's desserts were indeed unsurpassed, but taken all in all, Lucie was the better all around, from soup to nuts. And yet the point was marginally arguable. Odd though it may seem, none of the guests bethought themselves to point out how implausible it would have been to install such a culinary genius in their own households without being detected withal—thus does logic melt in the broth of gluttony.

"What day was this?" asked Moleson finally. "It was Sunday, was it not?"

The host drew himself up in his chair and fixed triumphant eyes on his diminutive guest. "I am unaware that I mentioned the day, sir. I merely referred to the weekend without mentioning the day. How came you to know then that this deed was done on Sunday rather than Saturday?"

Moleson blinked. "Why, sir," he said, and paused. "I said merely Sunday because you referred to the middle of the day, when the

other house servants would ordinarily have been in church."

"But you were not there, sir, I observed," said Dunleavy.

"I was home with my wife," cried Moleson. It was a lie, in fact, because that unprepossessing man was in town with his mistress—such are the remarkable secrets of any human assemblage. "She was feeling poorly. My wife, I mean," he said.

The host shifted his great bulk in his chair and changed his tack. "Mr. Dunleavy," he said peremptorily, "could you oblige me by telling us who else attended services that day, sir?"

"Among this gathering?" Dunleavy indicated Sir John with his chin. "Sir John and young Bartholomew."

"Aha!" the host said shrewdly.

Sir John came awake with a start. "Never!"

"As a matter of fact," Dunleavy said, lowering his voice, "he is right. Sir John usually attends service, but last Sunday he did not; I am mistaken, now that I think on it."

There was a long silence. Bartholomew murmured softly, "I say, something just occurred to me. Could Lucie have, um . . ." he gave Sir John a guarded look, and continued, whispering unnecessarily, "could she have said Sir John, and have swallowed the first word in her panic, as it were? Why else would she use the Christian name of a gentleman?"

All looked at him, then quickly and covertly at Sir John, who had returned to his meal and was obliviously making the best of a soggy Yorkshire pudding. Bartholomew bent over his food, also, as did the others, to allay any suspicion about their topic of discussion.

"The brooch," muttered the host.

"Aye," whispered Bartholomew. It was common knowledge that Sir John had a soldier's eye for the ladies, and once, after a magnificent New Year's Eve party at the host's mansion, had given Lucie a pearl brooch, which of course she never wore—she was a woman who never questioned her station.

And yet, the host reminded them, in all probability Lucie would have proceeded to speak the last name if she had been able to. He frowned, trying to follow the thread of a stray recollection, but not sure what it was, as one tried to remember a fast-fading dream. The rest of the company discussed in low tones whether Sir John could indeed have perpetrated such a deed, with quick looks at the old man, which he answered with a smile or a pleasant nod before bending over his plate again. Gravely and somewhat reluctantly, the other guests dismissed their notion as too improbable.

John Stout folded his arms. "Two among us were in church, one was tending to his wife, one—" with a glance at Sir John "—is palpably too honorable a personage to be involved." He turned the color of the beef on his plate, which he had privately observed a few minutes ago was underdone in a way that Lucie never would have allowed. But he proceeded with his characteristic steadiness. "Well, then, that leaves only myself to be accounted for, does it not?" He sighed. "And let us call an end to this farce, then," he said, "because it was I that Lucie referred to in her last utterance."

Just then the manservant entered with a fresh bottle of wine, and the flabbergasted guests remained in a ghastly silence while their minds seethed as wildly as the storm outside. When the servant withdrew, Stout resumed speaking.

"But it was not to name her assailant, but her witness," he said. "I witnessed this incident, or part of it, and at the last moment Lucie saw that I had seen all, and when she said 'John'—no doubt she meant to proceed to my last name—I'm of the belief that it was to steer the investigators in my direction."

"My word," said the host weakly, while the other guests, with astonished ejaculations, pressed Stout for an explanation.

"Last Sunday I happened to stop here, on a sudden thought. I like a Sunday ramble, as you all know, and was headed for Gulley's Meadow," he said.

"But—"

"My visit was to your gardener, sir, not yourself, as it happened; thus, without standing on ceremony, I went directly round back and saw him occupied in the apple orchard. I have been much troubled by aphids this year, and someone in the square had remarked he had heard your Peter had chanced on an efficacious remedy. But just as I started for the orchard, I heard a strangled cry from within and rushed to the kitchen door, but it was locked. I then made bold to spring to the pantry window, and from there beheld Lucie, gagged and bound in a kitchen chair, with her eyes frantic, and then filled with relief when she saw me, no doubt thinking her rescue was near. But try as I might, raising great shouts all the while, I could not squeeze through that blasted narrow pantry window, and so withdrew and ran to the orchard to fetch Peter."

Stout regarded the bewildered host. "I was not sure you were home, you see, whereas Peter was at least in sight. But it must have been in that space of time that you entered the pantry and yourself withdrew to seek help. And before I reached the or-

chard—it's around by the south side, as you may know—" he told the other guests, "I heard a tremendous scraping from the direction of the kitchen and ran back, retracing my steps, to see the door burst open and a hooded figure emerge, carrying Lucie, chair and all, as easily as if she were a child's dolly."

"What did he look like?" Moleson cried. "Oh, he was hooded. Sorry."

Sir John, who had fallen asleep again, gave a grunt.

"I heard no shouts, Mr. Stout," said the host.

Stout ignored his host. "Aye, he was hooded, Mr. Moleson," said he, "but no hood could disguise his great height and remarkable girth." Raising his pale eyebrows, Stout stared at the host, and all eyes except Sir John's followed Stout's eyes. And yet the host, his eyes fixed on Stout, seemed inattentive to the universal attention. Stout went on, "And this person bore her around the house to a carriage, threw her in, aye, chair and all, climbed to the postern, and lashed the horse into a gallop. I followed. I am fairly swift of foot, but of course it was hopeless. And then, I thought, if I could make it up there to the rise before they vanished from sight, at least I could see which fork the villain took. But again I was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, being halfway home by then, I repaired to my own house and saddled Princess, and we took off for the constabulary without a moment's hesitation."

The host now gazed at Stout in undisguised disbelief. "If this be true, why then did the constable not so inform me?"

Stout gave a short laugh. "I happened to mention to him tonight's invitation, and the constable was of a mind that our host might let slip some clue as to the events that preceded Sunday's misfortune."

The host's mouth fell open, and Bartholomew could not stifle a burst of laughter.

Turning to the rest, Stout said, "I apologize for not making my purpose known earlier, but you can see it would have been inadvisable."

Dunleavy, who had long ago forgotten his threat to take leave of the gathering, perused the host soberly. "Of great height, you say," he said, and his eyes swept around the table before returning to the giant master of the house.

The host's eye in turn went from face to face. "What? You don't believe—you cannot believe it was I who would sacrifice my own, who would, why that would . . . that goes against all logic, why would I kill the goose that lays the golden eggs?"

"Lucie was a woman, after all," said Moleson.



"She was a cook!" the host cried.

"A double blessing, some might think," said Bartholomew.

The host was confused and appalled. "You cannot think," he began, and stopped, trying to untangle his thoughts. "A woman."

"Come, come," said Dunleavy, not unkindly. "Perhaps you made an importunate advance and Lucie rejected you, and you tied her up as punishment, a little discipline or, who knows what you felt? Perchance such a locket as you describe is not missing at all, eh?" The host shook his head until his cheeks quivered, but Dunleavy pursued his point relentlessly. "And then she unexpectedly dies of fright, and now in panic you seize some apron or somesuch, and behold yourself with it and make your escape with the evidence, as it were."

Stout, watching the light shift in the bowl of his spoon as he played with it, said, "I suppose that is worth passing on to the constable, with all the rest."

"The constable, you say, Mr. Stout?"

"Naturally I told the constable all that I witnessed last Sunday."

Moleson had been clamping his small mouth together, then opening it again, biting his lips as eagerness and reluctance warred in his mind. Finally he could contain himself no longer. "She did not die alone, methinks," he cried. "I suspect the poor woman was with child." In fact, a suspicion even more horrid was beginning to form in his mind: that the host himself may have placed poor Lucie in that difficulty and resorted to murder to mask his sin.

"Nonsense!" said the host. "Not Lucie. Next you'll be saying that it was I who fathered it." His words, spoken lightly, hung in the air as all eyes remained on him. For a moment, the host absorbed their gaze, boring into him, layer by layer, until it reached his quick, and his face collapsed. "No," he said, and the words was more a sigh than a word. "I see. I must say."

Without a by-your-leave, he removed himself from the table, went a few steps, stopped, shook his head, and returned to his place. "I have to tell you all, if such a suspicion has included me, as I see it has, in some connection or another . . ." He took a great breath that rounded his cheeks as he exhaled it. "The truth is—oh, I admit, there was an incident in my youth, but the woman in question was mistaken, as it turned out, after any amount of worry and concern on my part, as you can well imagine." Piously he lifted his head heavenward, sighed, lowered his head, burped, and raised his visage again. "Excuse me. The truth is that all my life I have been shy of women. And after that, well, I'd learned my lesson."

For a moment the host seemed deep in thought. "Odd creatures, I've always thought," he said. "And then," continued this peculiar man, "babies, well. You look at a woman, and it reminds you of babies, and I have never been able to tolerate babies. They always remind me of drunks, and I can't abide drunks."

"Drunks?" said Bartholomew.

"Yes, you know," the host said. "Their heads, you know, babies' heads bobble around, and they drool and mumble, and you can't understand what they're saying. And then, they have these sudden fits of crying, just like drunks."

Bartholomew chuckled; the host hung his head. "At least Lucie was happy here," he said at last. "Wasn't she?"

"Apparently not." Stout rested his chin in his hand. "How did the constable put it? She was paid a pittance; she was lonesome, overworked, and condemned to fifteen more years of these conditions by her indentureship."

"But she sang at her work! What you don't know is, she sang at her work!"

"Aye, that we know."

"Well then. If she was so unhappy, why did she sing at her work?"

"She was brave."

The host gave a quavering sigh. "I can only be glad she died before she was carried off," he said.

"Aye," echoed several of the men sententiously.

It was a long, long ride to London, but the storm had abated, and the night air was fragrant. John Stout was not in the habit of harrying his good horse Princess beyond her powers, and so it was two in the morning before he pulled up at the inn and unlocked the door to his room a few minutes later.

"Hullo, my love," murmured Lucie, waking instantly.

Stout moved to the bed and gathered her in his arms.

"How did it go, my John? We're all packed."

"In a few months, dear heart, you'll have a maid to do such tasks. Two. Three. As many as you want."

Lucie nuzzled his neck, laughing. "Don't be silly. I love to pack for you and touch your clothes. Did all go as planned?"

"Aye, it went, it went remarkably. I can only be amazed and ashamed that I found the lies so easy on my tongue and worry that I will be seduced into a new habit."

"Never," said Lucie. "And now, my own, my dear, I bless your dear heart for it, but why must we get married before we leave? I wanted to tell you that before I hear all of what you heard tonight,

and what you said."

"It's only right we take our vows," Stout said stoutly. "Besides, on the Continent, who knows what language we would be married in? We might be getting a fishing license and think we're legal at last. I want you to be my bride in English, dear one."

"I don't want anything to change."

"You're the one that wants to change, and change your own dear way of talking and change your name and learn to be a lady and all that rot. But I'm getting used to the auburn hair," he said with a smile, fingering the locks that were flaxen a few days ago.

"It's the only way, John. I must. We shan't come back to Surrey until I'm a lady with a lady's ways," she said firmly, "for your sake more than mine. I won't have you be the subject of gossip, that's why I insisted that Lucie must die, since he wouldn't release me from my servitude. The scoundrel! But enough of that. Did they believe you, then? And did you cast suspicion on him, and were you believed?"

"I hooked the poor big fish, and he wriggled off to all our satisfaction. At least it will keep him from pursuing the matter overmuch. No doubt all the good wives for miles around will bully their young ones into behaving with tales of a monster man ready to carry off bad children. Why, he'll be twenty feet tall in a few weeks, mark my words."

Lucie giggled. "And did he mention the pots falling? How did he describe it all?"

"No, he never mentioned the pots," Stout said. "Oh, but guess what—he didn't discover the missing locket until halfway through dinner. He'd not looked in that clasped box."

"Merciful heavens!" she cried. "Don't forget, we musn't forget to send it back before we cross the Channel, John."

"Right, my love," he said.

It was not the only part of the scheme that had gone awry. The fact was that Lucie had followed their bold plan to name the perpetrator as the informant, trading on John Stout's reputation to assure that his tale would be believed. Thus she had supplied his full name. But the host, in his haste to reach her in the pantry, had brushed some stacked pots, setting them to teeter, and they had crashed at mention of Stout's surname. And after that, the potion that had caused her pulse to all but disappear was taking its effect. Thus the host, formulating his own plot, had contrived his memorable dinner party.

"At least my damned blushes stood me in good stead for a

change," Stout said. "I was more beet than human all night, I can assure you. Yet, accustomed as they are to my girlishness, none remarked on it, I am certain."

"Girlishness?" she said, laughing and kissing him. "Hardly."

After another tender kiss, Stout murmured, "I can't believe they won't recognize you on our return. How could they mistake you?"

"You'll see. You were the only one who ever noticed me."

"As long as you don't cook; then the game would be up."

"Oh, how was the meal tonight?" she cried, "I forgot to ask."

"Abominable."

A little later, as they lay abed, he was still telling her how the evening progressed, and which John said what, and what John answered, and at times she was laughing so much that he was thrown into merriment also. Only the part of the conversation that might have caused her pain was kept private. But when he told of how Sir John had said, "Saucy wench," she was much put out, crying, "How dare he!"

"Oh, he just meant in the way of white saucy," Stout said drolly, "or Hollandaise, or cheese saucy, or Bearnaise, or who knows?" And years later, when their children were grown, he could still make her giggle with those very same words.

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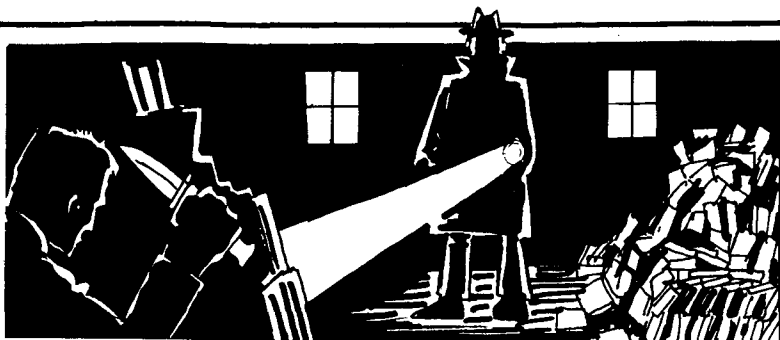
### **MID-DECEMBER "UNSOLVED" SOLUTION:**

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It is apparent to Wendy Pickell that the thieves intended to steal only the anonymous *Garden of Eden* and set up a number of red herrings to throw off, and then stop, the subsequent investigation. They stole four paintings and presumably returned them all, having engaged only in what appeared to be a serious but harmless joke: namely painting raisins into the navels of nudes, as though it were all a freshman prank.

The discovery, or rediscovery, of the paintings was a relief to Monopoly Trust and Wendy Pickell, but the vandalism was an entirely new matter. And the thieves must have intended that Wendy and Monopoly Trust be further relieved to learn that the damage was easily remediable. All this distraction was designed to let the fake *Garden of Eden* slip in undetected.

Mark Dexel, and then Wendy, however, knew that paintings of Adam and Eve in the Renaissance, especially the early Renaissance, usually depicted those characters without navels. The artist who produced the fake had to give them navels to make the distraction work. It almost succeeded.



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HTKC-8

# The Case Is Altered

by Margery Allingham



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

**M**r. Albert Champion, sitting in a first-class smoking compartment, was just reflecting sadly that an atmosphere of stultifying decency could make even Christmas something of a stuffed-owl occasion, when a new hogskin suitcase of distinctive design hit him on the knees. At the same moment a golf bag bruised the shins of the shy young man opposite, an armful of assorted magazines burst over the pretty girl in the far corner, and a blast of icy air swept round the carriage. There was the familiar rattle and lurch which indicates that the train has started at last, a squawk from a receding porter, and Lance Feering arrived before him apparently by rocket.

"Caught it," said the newcomer with the air of one confidently expecting congratulations, but as the train bumped jerkily he teetered back on his heels and collapsed between the two young people on the opposite seat.

"My dear chap, so we noticed," murmured Champion, and he smiled apologetically at the girl, now disentangling herself from the shellburst of newsprint. It was his own disarming my-poor-friend-is-afflicted variety of smile that he privately considered infallible, but on this occasion it let him down.

The girl, who was in the early twenties and was slim and fair, with eyes like licked brandy-balls, as Lance Feering inelegantly put it afterward, regarded him with grave interest. She stacked the magazines into a neat bundle and placed them on the seat opposite before returning to her own book. Even Mr. Feering, who was in one of his more exuberant moods, was aware of that chilly protest. He began to apologize.

Champion had known Feering in his student days, long before he had become one of the foremost designers of stage decors in Europe, and was used to him, but now even he was impressed. Lance's apologies were easy but also abject. He collected his bag, stowed it on a clear space on the rack above the shy young man's head, thrust his golf things under the seat, positively blushed when he claimed his magazines, and regarded the girl with pathetic humility. She glanced at him when he spoke, nodded coolly with just enough graciousness not to be gauche, and turned over a page.

Champion was secretly amused. At the top of his form Lance was reputed to be irresistible. His dark face with the long mournful nose and bright eyes were unhandsome enough to be interesting, and the quick gestures of his short painter's hands made his conversation picturesque. His singular lack of success on this occasion clearly astonished him and he sat back in his corner eyeing the



young woman with covert mistrust.

Campion resettled himself to the two hours' rigid silence which etiquette demands from firstclass travelers who, although they are more than probably going to be asked to dance a reel together if not to share a bathroom only a few hours hence, have not yet been introduced.

There was no way of telling if the shy young man and the girl with the brandy-ball eyes knew each other, and whether they too were en route for Underhill, Sir Philip Cookham's Norfolk place. Campion was inclined to regard the coming festivities with a certain amount of lugubrious curiosity. Cookham himself was a magnificent old boy, of course, "one of the more valuable pieces in the Cabinet," as someone had once said of him, but Florence was a different kettle of fish. Born to wealth and breeding, she had grown blasé towards both of them and now took her delight in notabilities, a dangerous affectation in Campion's experience. She was some sort of remote aunt of his.

He glanced again at the young people, caught the boy unaware, and was immediately interested.

The illustrated magazine had dropped from the young man's hand and he was looking out of the window, his mouth drawn down at the corners and a narrow frown between his thick eyebrows. It was not an unattractive face, too young for strong character but decent and open enough in the ordinary way. At that particular moment, however, it wore a revealing expression. There was recklessness in the twist of the mouth and sullenness in the eyes, while the hand which lay upon the inside arm rest was clenched.

Campion was curious. Young people do not usually go away for Christmas in this top-step-at-the-dentist's frame of mind. The girl looked up from her book.

"How far is Underhill from the station?" she inquired.

"Five miles. They'll meet us." The shy young man turned to her so easily and with such obvious affection that any romantic theory Campion might have formed was knocked on the head instantly. The youngster's troubles evidently had nothing to do with love.

Lance had raised his head with bright-eyed interest at the gratuitous information and now a faintly sardonic expression appeared upon his lips. Campion sighed for him. For a man who fell in and out of love with the abandonment of a seal round a pool, Lance Feering was an impossible optimist. Already he was regarding the girl with that shy despair which so many ladies had found too piteous to be allowed to persist. Campion washed his hands of him

and turned away just in time to notice a stranger glancing in at them from the corridor. It was a dark and arrogant young face and he recognized it instantly, feeling at the same time a deep wave of sympathy for old Cookham. Florence, he gathered, had done it again.

Young Victor Preen, son of old Preen of the Preen Aero Company, was certainly notable, not to say notorious. He had obtained much publicity in his short life for his sensational flights, but a great deal more for adventures less creditable; and when angry old gentlemen in the armchairs of exclusive clubs let themselves go about the blackguardliness of the younger generation, it was very often of Victor Preen that they were thinking.

He stood now a little to the left of the compartment window, leaning idly against the wall, his chin up and his heavy lids drooping. At first sight he did not appear to be taking any interest in the occupants of the compartment, but when the shy young man looked up, Campion happened to see the swift glance of recognition, and of something else, which passed between them. Presently, still with the same elaborate casualness, the man in the corridor wandered away, leaving the other staring in front of him, the same sullen expression still in his eyes.

The incident passed so quickly that it was impossible to define the exact nature of that second glance, but Campion was never a man to go imagining things, which was why he was surprised when they arrived at Minstree station to hear Henry Boule, Florence's private secretary, introducing the two and to notice that they met as strangers.

It was pouring with rain as they came out of the station, and Boule, who, like all Florence's secretaries, appeared to be suffering from an advanced case of nerves, bundled them all into two big Daimlers, a smaller car, and a shooting-brake. Campion looked round him at Florence's Christmas bag with some dismay. She had surpassed herself. Besides Lance there were at least half a dozen celebrities: a brace of political highlights, an angry looking lady novelist, Madja from the ballet, a startled R.A., and Victor Preen, as well as some twelve or thirteen unfamiliar faces who looked as if they might belong to Art, Money, or even mere Relations.

Campion became separated from Lance and was looking for him anxiously when he saw him at last in one of the cars, with the novelist on one side and the girl with brandy-ball eyes on the other, Victor Preen making up the ill-assorted four.

Since Campion was an unassuming sort of person he was rele-

gated to the brake with Boule himself, the shy young man, and the whole of the luggage. Boule introduced them awkwardly and collapsed into a seat, wiping the beads from off his forehead with a relief which was a little too blatant to be tactful.

Campion, who had learned that the shy young man's name was Peter Groome, made a tentative inquiry of him as they sat jolting shoulder to shoulder in the back of the car. He nodded.

"Yes, it's the same family," he said. "Cookham's sister married a brother of my father's. I'm some sort of relation, I suppose."

The prospect did not seem to fill him with any great enthusiasm and once again Campion's curiosity was piqued. Young Mr. Groome was certainly not in seasonable mood.

In the ordinary way Campion would have dismissed the matter from his mind, but there was something about the youngster which attracted him, something indefinable and of a despairing quality, and moreover, there had been that curious intercepted glance in the train.

They talked in a desultory fashion throughout the uncomfortable journey. Campion learned that young Groome was in his father's firm of solicitors, that he was engaged to be married to the girl with the brandy-ball eyes, who was a Miss Patricia Bullard of an old north country family, and that he thought Christmas was a waste of time.

"I hate it," he said with a sudden passionate intensity which startled even his mild inquisitor. "All this sentimental good-will-to-all-men business is false and sickening. There's no such thing as good will. The world's rotten."

He blushed as soon as he had spoken and turned away.

"I'm sorry," he murmured, "but all this bogus Dickensian stuff makes me writhe."

Campion made no direct comment. Instead he asked with affable inconsequence, "Was that young Victor Preen I saw in the other car?"

Peter Groome turned his head and regarded him with the steady stare of the willfully obtuse.

"I was introduced to someone with a name like that, I think," he said carefully. "He was a little baldish man, wasn't he?"

"No, that's Sir George." The secretary leaned over the luggage to give the information. "Preen is the tall young man, rather handsome, with the very curling hair. He's *the* Preen, you know." He sighed. "It seems very young to be a millionaire, doesn't it?"

"Obscenely so," said Mr. Peter Groome abruptly, and returned

to his despairing contemplation of the landscape.

Underhill was *en fête* to receive them. As soon as Campion observed the preparations, his sympathy for young Mr. Groome increased, for to a jaundiced eye Lady Florence's display might well have proved as dispiriting as Preen's bank balance. Florence had "gone all Dickens," as she said herself at the top of her voice, linking her arm through Campion's, clutching the R.A. with her free hand, and capturing Lance with a bright birdlike eye.

The great Jacobean house was festooned with holly. An eighteen foot tree stood in the great hall. Yule logs blazed on iron dogs in the wide hearths and already the atmosphere was thick with that curious Christmas smell which is part cigar smoke and part roasting food.

Sir Philip Cookham stood receiving his guests with pathetic bewilderment. Every now and again his features broke into a smile of genuine welcome as he saw a face he knew. He was a distinguished-looking old man with a fine head and eyes permanently worried by his country's troubles.

"My dear boy, delighted to see you. Delighted," he said, grasping Campion's hand. "I'm afraid you've been put over in the Dower House. Did Florence tell you? She said you wouldn't mind, but I insisted that Feering went over there with you and also young Peter." He sighed and brushed away the visitor's hasty reassurances. "I don't know why the dear girl never feels she has a party unless the house is so overcrowded that our best friends have to sleep in the annex," he said sadly.

The "dear girl," looking not more than fifty-five of her sixty years, was clinging to the arm of the lady novelist at that particular moment and the two women were emitting mirthless parrot cries at each other. Cookham smiled.

"She's happy, you know," he said indulgently. "She enjoys this sort of thing. Unfortunately I have a certain amount of urgent work to do this weekend, but we'll get in a chat, Campion, some time over the holiday. I want to hear your news. You're a lucky fellow. You can tell your adventures."

The lean man grimaced. "More secret sessions, sir?" he inquired.

The cabinet minister threw up his hands in a comic but expressive little gesture before he turned to greet the next guest.

As he dressed for dinner in his comfortable room in the small Georgian dower house across the park, Campion was inclined to

congratulate himself on his quarters. Underhill itself was a little too much of the ancient monument for strict comfort.

He had reached the tie stage when Lance appeared. He came in very elegant indeed and highly pleased with himself. Campion diagnosed the symptoms immediately and remained irritatingly incurious.

Lance sat down before the open fire and stretched his sleek legs.

"It's not even as if I were a goodlooking blighter, you know," he observed invitingly when the silence had become irksome to him. "In fact, Campion, when I consider myself I simply can't understand it. Did I so much as speak to the girl?"

"I don't know," said Campion, concentrating on his dressing. "Did you?"

"No." Lance was passionate in his denial. "Not a word. The hard-faced female with the inky fingers and the walrus mustache was telling me her life story all the way home in the car. This dear little puppet with the eyes was nothing more than a warm bundle at my side. I give you my dying oath on that. And yet—well, it's extraordinary, isn't it?"

Campion did not turn round. He could see the artist quite well through the mirror in front of him. Lance had a sheet of notepaper in his hand and was regarding it with that mixture of feigned amusement and secret delight which was typical of his eternally youthful spirit.

"Extraordinary," he repeated, glancing at Campion's unresponsive back. "She had nice eyes. Like licked brandy-balls."

"Exactly," agreed the lean man by the dressing table. "I thought she seemed very taken up with her fiancé, young Master Groome, though," he added tactlessly.

"Well, I noticed that, you know," Lance admitted, forgetting his professions of disinterest. "She hardly recognized my existence in the train. Still, there's absolutely no accounting for women. I've studied 'em all my life and never understood 'em yet. I mean to say, take this case in point. That kid ignored me, avoided me, looked through me. And yet look at this. I found it in my room when I came up to change just now."

Campion took the note with a certain amount of distaste. Lovely women were invariable stooping to folly, it seemed, but even so he could not accustom himself to the spectacle. The message was very brief. He read it at a glance and for the first time that day he was conscious of that old familiar flicker down the spine as his experienced nose smelled trouble. He re-read the three lines.

"There is a sundial on a stone pavement just off the drive. We saw it from the car. I'll wait ten minutes there for you half an hour after the party breaks up tonight."

There was neither signature nor initial, and the summons broke off as baldly as it had begun.

"Amazing, isn't it?" Lance had the grace to look shamefaced.

"Astounding." Champion's tone was flat. "Staggering, old boy. Er—fishy."

"Fishy?"

"Yes, don't you think so?" Champion was turning over the single sheet thoughtfully and there was no amusement in the pale eyes behind his horn-rimmed spectacles. "How did it arrive?"

"In, an unaddressed envelope. I don't suppose she caught my name. After all, there must be some people who don't know it yet." Lance was grinning impudently. "She's batty, of course. Not safe out and all the rest of it. But I liked her eyes and she's very young."

Champion perched himself on the edge of the table. He was still very serious.

"It's disturbing, isn't it?" he said. "Not nice. Makes one wonder."

"Oh, I don't know." Lance retrieved his property and tucked it into his pocket. "She's young and foolish, and it's Christmas."

Champion did not appear to have heard him. "I wonder," he said. "I should keep the appointment, I think. It may be unwise to interfere, but yes, I rather think I should."

"You're telling me." Lance was laughing. "I may be wrong, of course," he added defensively, "but I think that's a cry for help. The poor girl evidently saw that I looked a dependable sort of chap and—er—having her back against the wall for some reason or other she turned instinctively to the stranger with the kind face. Isn't that how you read it?"

"Since you press me, no. Not exactly," said Champion, and as they walked over to the house together he remained thoughtful and irritatingly uncommunicative.

Florence Cookham excelled herself that evening. Her guests were exhorted "to be young again," with the inevitable result that Underhill contained a company of irritated and exhausted people long before midnight.

One of her ladyship's more erroneous beliefs was that she was a born organizer, and that the real secret of entertaining people lay in giving everyone something to do. Thus Lance and the

R.A.—now even more startled-looking than ever—found themselves superintending the decoration of the great tree, while the girl with the brandy-ball eyes conducted a small informal dance in the drawing room, the lady novelist scowled over the bridge table, and the ballet star refused flatly to arrange amateur theatricals.

Only two people remained exempt from this tyranny. One was Sir Philip himself, who looked in every now and again, ready to plead urgent work awaiting him in his study whenever his wife pounced upon him, and the other was Mr. Champion, who had work to do on his own account and had long mastered the difficult art of self-effacement. Experience had taught him that half the secret of this maneuver was to keep discreetly on the move and he strolled from one party to another, always ready to look as if he belonged to any one of them should his hostess's eye ever come to rest upon him inquiringly.

For once his task was comparatively simple. Florence was in her element as she rushed about surrounded by breathless assistants, and at one period the very air in her vicinity seemed to have become thick with colored paper wrappings, yards of red ribbons, and a colored snowstorm of little address tickets as she directed the packing of the presents for the Tenants' Tree, a second monster which stood in the ornamental barn beyond the kitchens.

Champion left Lance to his fate, which promised to be six or seven hours' hard labor at the most moderate estimate, and continued his purposeful meandering. His lean figure drifted among the company with an apparent aimlessness which was deceptive. There was hidden urgency in his lazy movements and his pale eyes behind his spectacles were inquiring and unhappy.

He found Patricia Bullard dancing with Preen, and paused to watch them as they swung gracefully by him. The man was in a somewhat flamboyant mood, flashing his smile and his noisy witticisms about him after the fashion of his kind, but the girl was not so content. As Champion caught sight of her pale face over her partner's sleek shoulder his eyebrows rose. For an instant he almost believed in Lance's unlikely suggestion. The girl actually did look as though she had her back to the wall. She was watching the doorway nervously and her shiny eyes were afraid.

Champion looked about him for the other young man who should have been present, but Peter Groome was not in the ballroom, nor in the great hall, nor yet among the bridge tables in the drawing room, and half an hour later he had still not put in an appearance.



Campion was in the hall himself when he saw Patricia slip into the anteroom which led to Sir Philip's private study, that holy of holies which even Florence treated with a wholesome awe. Campion had paused for a moment to enjoy the spectacle of Lance, wild eyed and tight lipped, wrestling with the last of the blue glass balls and tinsel streamers on the Guests' Tree, when he caught sight of the flare of her silver skirt disappearing round a familiar doorway under one branch of the huge double staircase.

It was what he had been waiting for, and yet when it came his disappointment was unexpectedly acute, for he too had liked her smile and her brandy-ball eyes. The door was ajar when he reached it, and he pushed it open an inch or so farther, pausing on the threshold to consider the scene within. Patricia was on her knees before the paneled door which led into the inner room and was trying somewhat ineffectually to peer through the keyhole.

Campion stood looking at her regretfully, and when she straightened herself and paused to listen, with every line of her young body taut with the effort of concentration, he did not move.

Sir Philip's voice amid the noisy chatter behind him startled him, however, and he swung round to see the old man talking to a group on the other side of the room. A moment later the girl brushed past him and hurried away.

Campion went quietly into the anteroom. The study door was still closed and he moved over to the enormous period fireplace which stood beside it. This particular fireplace, with its carved and painted front, its wrought iron dogs and deeply recessed inglenooks, was one of the showpieces of Underhill.

At the moment the fire had died down and the interior of the cavern was dark, warm, and inviting. Campion stepped inside and sat down on the oak settee, where the shadows swallowed him. He had no intention of being unduly officious, but his quick ears had caught a faint sound in the inner room and Sir Philip's private sanctum was no place for furtive movements when its master was out of the way. He had not long to wait.

A few moments later the study door opened very quietly and someone came out. The newcomer moved across the room with a nervous, unsteady tread, and paused abruptly, his back to the quiet figure in the inglenook. Campion recognized Peter Groome and his thin mouth narrowed. He was sorry. He had liked the boy.

The youngster stood irresolute. He had his hands behind him, holding in one of them a flamboyant parcel wrapped in the colored paper and scarlet ribbon which littered the house. A sound from

the hall seemed to fluster him for he spun round, thrust the parcel into the inglenook which was the first hiding place to present itself, and returned to face the new arrival. It was the girl again. She came slowly across the room, her hands outstretched and her face raised to Peter's.

In view of everything, Campion thought it best to stay where he was, nor had he time to do anything else. She was speaking urgently, passionate sincerity in her low voice.

"Peter, I've been looking for you. Darling, there's something I've got to say and if I'm making an idiotic mistake then you've got to forgive me. Look here, you wouldn't go and do anything silly, would you? Would you, Peter? Look at me."

"My dear girl." He was laughing unsteadily and not very convincingly with his arms around her. "What on earth are you talking about?"

She drew back from him and peered earnestly into his face.

"You wouldn't, would you? Not even if it meant an awful lot. Not even if for some reason or other you felt you *had* to. Would you?"

He turned from her helplessly, a great weariness in the lines of his sturdy back, but she drew him round, forcing him to face her.

"Would he what, my dear?"

Florence's arch inquiry from the doorway separated them so hurriedly that she laughed delightedly and came briskly into the room, her gray curls a trifle disheveled and her draperies flowing.

"Too divinely young, I love it!" she said devastatingly. "I must kiss you both. Christmas is the time for love and youth and all the other dear charming things, isn't it? That's why I adore it. But my dears, not here. Not in this silly poky little room. Come along and help me, both of you, and then you can slip away and dance together later on. But don't come in this room. This is Philip's dull part of the house. Come along this minute. Have you seen my precious tree? Too incredibly distinguished, my darlings, with two great artists at work on it. You shall both tie on a candle. Come along."

She swept them away like an avalanche. No protest was possible. Peter shot a single horrified glance towards the fireplace, but Florence was gripping his arm; he was thrust out into the hall and the door closed firmly behind him.

Campion was left in his corner with the parcel less than a dozen feet away from him on the opposite bench. He moved over and picked it up. It was a long flat package wrapped in holly-printed tissue. Moreover, it was unexpectedly heavy and the ends were unbound.

He turned it over once or twice, wrestling with a strong disinclination to interfere, but a vivid recollection of the girl with the brandy-ball eyes, in her silver dress, her small pale face alive with anxiety, made up his mind for him and, sighing, he pulled the ribbon.

The typewritten folder which fell on to his knees surprised him at first, for it was not at all what he had expected, nor was its title, "Report on Messrs. Anderson and Coleridge, Messrs. Saunders, Duval and Berry, and Messrs. Birmingham and Rose," immediately enlightening, and when he opened it at random a column of incomprehensible figures confronted him. It was a scribbled pencil note in a precise hand at the foot of one of the pages which gave him his first clue.

"These figures are estimated by us to be a reliable forecast of this firm's full working capacity,"

he read, and after that he became very serious indeed.

Two hours later it was bitterly cold in the garden and a thin white mist hung over the dark shrubbery which lined the drive when Mr. Campion, picking his way cautiously along the clipped grass verge, came quietly down to the sundial walk. Behind him the gabled roofs of Underhill were shadowy against a frosty sky. There were still a few lights in the upper windows, but below stairs the entire place was in darkness.

Campion hunched his greatcoat about him and plodded on, unwonted severity in the lines of his thin face.

He came upon the sundial walk at last and paused, straining his eyes to see through the mist. He made out the figure standing by the stone column, and heaved a sigh of relief as he recognized the jaunty shoulders of the Christmas tree decorator. Lance's incurable romanticism was going to be useful at last, he reflected with wry amusement.

He did not join his friend but withdrew into the shadows of a great clump of rhododendrons and composed himself to wait. He intensely disliked the situation in which he found himself. Apart from the extreme physical discomfort involved, he had a natural aversion towards the project on hand, but little fairhaired girls with shiny eyes can be very appealing.

It was a freezing vigil. He could hear Lance stamping about in the mist, swearing softly to himself, and even that supremely comic phenomenon had its unsatisfactory side.

They were both shivering and the mist's damp fingers seemed to have stroked their very bones when at last Campion stiffened. He had heard a rustle behind him and presently there was a movement in the wet leaves, followed by the sharp ring of feet on the stones. Lance swung round immediately, only to drop back in astonishment as a tall figure bore down.

"Where is it?"

Neither the words nor the voice came as a complete surprise to Campion, but the unfortunate Lance was taken entirely off his guard.

"Why, hello, Preen," he said involuntarily. "What the devil are you doing here?"

The newcomer had stopped in his tracks, his face a white blur in the uncertain light. For a moment he stood perfectly still and then, turning on his heel, he made off without a word.

"Ah, but I'm afraid it's not quite so simple as that, my dear chap."

Campion stepped out of his friendly shadows and as the younger man passed, slipped an arm through his and swung him round to face the startled Lance, who was coming up at the double.

"You can't clear off like this," he went on, still in the same affable, conversational tone. "You have something to give Peter Groome, haven't you? Something he rather wants?"

"Who the hell are you?" Preen jerked up his arm as he spoke and might have wrenched himself free had it not been for Lance, who had recognized Campion's voice and, although completely in the dark, was yet quick enough to grasp certain essentials.

"That's right, Preen," he said, seizing the man's other arm in a bear's hug. "Hand it over. Don't be a fool. Hand it over."

This line of attack appeared to be inspirational, since they felt the powerful youngster stiffen between them.

"Look here, how many people know about this?"

"The world—" Lance was beginning cheerfully when Campion forestalled him.

"We three and Peter Groome," he said quietly. "At the moment Sir Philip has no idea that Messr. Preen's curiosity concerning the probable placing of government orders for aircraft parts has overstepped the bounds of common sense. You're acting alone, I suppose?"

"Oh, lord, yes, of course." Preen was cracking dangerously. "If my old man gets to hear of this I—oh, well, I might as well go and crash."

"I thought so." Campion sounded content. "Your father has a

reputation to consider. So has our young friend Groome. You'd better hand it over."

"What?"

"Since you force me to be vulgar, whatever it was you were attempting to use as blackmail, my precious young friend," he said. "Whatever it may be, in fact, that you hold over young Groome and were trying to use in your attempt to force him to let you have a look at a confidential government report concerning the orders which certain aircraft firms were likely to receive in the next six months. In your position you could have made pretty good use of them, couldn't you? Frankly, I haven't the faintest idea what this incriminating document may be. When I was young, objectionably wealthy youths accepted I.O.U.'s from their poorer companions, but now that's gone out of fashion. What's the modern equivalent? An R.D. check, I suppose?"

Preen said nothing. He put his hand in an inner pocket and drew out an envelope which he handed over without a word. Campion examined the slip of pink paper within by the light of a pencil torch.

"You kept it for quite a time before trying to cash it, didn't you?" he said. "Dear me, that's rather an old trick and it was never admired. Young men who are careless with their accounts have been caught out like that before. It simply wouldn't have looked good to his legal-minded old man, I take it? You two seem to be hampered by your respective papas' integrity. Yes, well, you can go now."

Preen hesitated, opened his mouth to protest, but thought better of it. Lance looked after his retreating figure for some little time before he returned to his friend.

"Who wrote that blinking note?" he demanded.

"He did, of course," said Campion brutally. "He wanted to see the report but was making absolutely sure that young Groome took all the risks of being found with it."

"Preen wrote the note," Lance repeated blankly.

"Well, naturally," said Campion absently. "That was obvious as soon as the report appeared in the picture. He was the only man in the place with the necessary special information to make use of it."

Lance made no comment. He pulled his coat collar more closely about his throat and stuffed his hands into his pockets.

All the same the artist was not quite satisfied, for, later still, when Campion was sitting in his dressing gown writing a note at

one of the little escritaires which Florence so thoughtfully provided in her guest bedrooms, he came padding in again and stood warming himself before the fire.

"Why?" he demanded suddenly. "Why did I get the invitation?"

"Oh, that was a question of luggage," Campion spoke over his shoulder. "That bothered me at first, but as soon as we fixed it onto Preen that little mystery became blindingly clear. Do you remember falling into the carriage this afternoon? Where did you put your elegant piece of gent's natty suitcasing? Over young Groome's head. Preen saw it from the corridor and assumed that the chap was sitting *under his own bag*! He sent his own man over here with the note, told him not to ask for Peter by name but to follow the nice new pigskin suitcase upstairs."

Lance nodded regretfully. "Very likely," he said sadly. "Funny thing. I was sure it was the girl."

After a while he came over to the desk. Campion put down his pen and indicated the written sheet.

"Dear Groome," it ran, "I enclose a little matter that I should burn forthwith. The package you left in the inglenook is still there, right at the back on the left-hand side, cunningly concealed under a pile of logs. It has not been seen by anyone who could possibly understand it. If you nipped over very early this morning you could return it to its appointed place without any trouble. If I may venture a word of advice, it is never worth it."

The author grimaced. "It's a bit avuncular," he admitted awkwardly, "but what else can I do? His light is still on, poor chap. I thought I'd stick it under his door."

Lance was grinning wickedly.

"That's fine," he murmured. "The old man does his stuff for reckless youth. There's just the signature now and that ought to be as obvious as everything else has been to you. I'll write it for you. 'Merry Christmas. Love from Santa Claus.'"

"You win," said Mr. Campion.

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

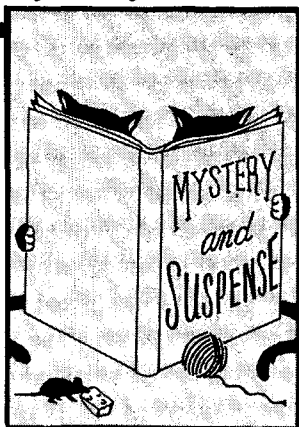


Illustration by Sheila Smith

**A**nyone for a little homicide with their holly? How about a murder beneath the mistletoe, or a blunt instrument to the noggin as you sip your special nog? 'Tis the season, after all, to be jolly. To mystery lovers everywhere, that means a crackling fire blazing away in the background as we delve into a roaring good book. What could be jollier?

So it's in the spirit of the season that I thought I'd share with you some novels and anthologies set at holiday time. I've tried to mention only books that are currently in print, titles that you should be able to find at—or at least order from—your favorite bookstore, though this is by no means a complete list. It's a perfect combination, in a way, the marriage of murder and holidays. The contrast of a joyful season and mindless tragedy, the age-old struggle of good versus evil, the idea of giving and generosity opposite greed and selfishness—what better foil for a crime novel, after all?

New on the racks this year is M. D. Lake's **Cold Comfort** (Avon, \$3.50), which brings back the campus-cop heroine of **Amends for Murder** (Avon, \$3.50), the debut of Peggy O'Neill. *Amends* was nominated for an American Mystery Award (sponsored by the *Drood Review*), and this follow-up will increase the number of Lake's fans. Memorable characters, some breathtaking action scenes, and a clever plot all add up to the perfect stocking stuffer.



A second holiday mystery with a female sleuth is Marcia Muller's **There's Nothing to Be Afraid Of** (Mysterious Press, \$4.95). This is another of the entries in Muller's exceptionally fine series starring private eye Sharon McCone. If you like Southern Cal women P.I.'s, do get to know McCone, and get in the mood for merriment at the same time. Or look for Margaret Maron's **Corpus Christmas**, a Sigrid Harald tale, which was published last year in hardcover by the Doubleday Crime Club.

Although Christmas mysteries frequently fit as snugly inside the term "cosy" as a lump of coal in a stocking, authors who would sneer if called "cosy" have also used the holidays as background. You might pick up Margaret Millar's **Vanish in an Instant** (IPL, \$7.95). Millar's psychological suspense novels are now back in print in paperback editions, and new readers are discovering her imagination and power as a writer. Or try Fredric Brown's **Murder Can Be Fun** (Carroll & Graf, \$3.95), George Chesbro's **Second Horseman Out of Eden** (Mysterious Press, \$4.95), or Patrick Ruell's **Red Christmas** (Mysterious Press, \$3.50). Ruell is a pseudonym for Reginald Hill, the author of the excellent Scotland Yard series with the unlikely sleuthing team of Dalziel and Pascoe. The Ruell novels are non-series suspense tales marked by the same fine writing, if not altogether possessing the same reader appeal. But then none of these fits into the traditional Christmas mystery category.

Yes, Virginia, there *are* plenty of holiday mysteries that are as traditional as plum pudding and as comfy as last year's slippers. So brew yourself some Earl Grey tea, put some Christmas cookies on your plate, and settle back to relive the feeling of Christmas both present and past.

Why not begin with Dame Agatha Christie herself? This year we celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of her birth, yet many would claim that her **Holiday for Murder** (Bantam, \$3.50) isn't the best book listed in this column by any standard. True, perhaps, but then why do I reread this Poirot tale every few years?

Marian Babson was probably paying homage to Christie herself when she penned **Murder on a Mystery Tour** (Bantam, \$3.50), and I intend the comparison of the two authors here as a high compliment to Babson. *Mystery Tour* is, in fact, made to order for Christie fans. There's a snowbound English country house full of suspects who are near strangers, fellow travelers arrived for a "murder weekend," and Babson has a light touch with her characters, a wonderful plot, bits of humor, and, of course, a holiday

setting. Mary Monica Pulver's new book, **Original Sin** (Walker, \$18.95), also takes place at an isolated country house over Christmas. Readers of AHMM know Pulver as the author of short stories published in these pages, as well as the author of *Murder at the War* and two other novels featuring a husband and wife sleuthing team. *Original Sin* should be out just in time for gift-giving.

If the stresses of the season are already driving you to murder, perhaps you should try some mysteries with holiday merriment. Charles Cohen's **Silver Linings** (Dell, \$3.50) stars a househusband with a delightfully droll view of the world—especially his world, a well-to-do Chicago suburb.

For more traditional entries we can always look to others of our favorite series. In this group we'll include Ngaio Marsh's **Tied Up in Tinsel** (Berkley, \$3.50), with Alleyn's investigation into the killing of Santa Claus; Emma Lathen's **Banking on Death** (Pocket Books, \$2.95); Ellery Queen's **The Finishing Stroke** (Carroll & Graf, \$3.95); James McClure's **The Gooseberry Fool** (Pantheon, \$2.95); the 87th Precinct gang in Ed McBain's **Sadie When She Died** (NAL, \$3.95); and Martha Grimes's **Jerusalem Inn** (Dell, \$4.50), though in the latter Inspector Jury certainly doesn't get what he wants for Christmas. Sister Carol Anne O'Marie debuted her series heroine, a retired nun, in another holiday mystery. Titled **Advent of Dying** (Dell, \$3.50), this one has characters who celebrate the season for its religious rituals and significance as well as the secular ones. Charlotte MacLeod's **Rest You Merry** (Avon, \$3.50) was also the first time professor Peter Shandy appeared on the sleuthing scene, in novel form, at least.

Finally, why not stock up on anthologies that celebrate the more murderous aspects of the season? They're perfect for those endless "waits": waiting for the bus after a weary day of seeking out that special gift, waiting in the free gift wrap line; waiting for the mincemeat pies to bake. Try the **Twelve Crimes of Christmas** or the **Twelve Frights of Christmas**, both edited by the team of Waugh and Greenberg (both Dell, \$3.50). If you feel like something more old fashioned and spookier, pick up Kathryn Cramer's collection titled **Christmas Ghosts** (Dell, \$3.50). Most recently Thomas Godfrey's two excellent anthologies, **Murder for Christmas** and **Murder for Christmas II** (Mysterious Press, \$3.95 ea.) have come out in paperback editions. With selections from a number of new and old favorites, and illustrations by the zany Gahan Wilson, these two make exceptionally fun stocking stuffers.

Happy holiday reading!

# THE STORY THAT WON



The September Mysterious Photo Marva Chandler of Turner able mentions go to Art Cosingan of Marietta, Georgia; Jan vania; Mary McNeal of Jeffer-Kimsey of Pueblo, Colorado; Virginia; Michael C. McPherson of Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada; and Alfred W. Cross of Sacramento, California.

tograph contest was won by Valley, Alberta, Canada. Honor of Fairfax, Virginia; O. S. Flana-Streilein of Johnstown, Pennsylvan, Maryland; Mary Ellen Diane L. Chatelan of Vienna, Virginia; and Alfred W. Cross of Sacramento, California.

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## ON THE STREET WHERE YOU LIVE by Marva Chandler

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He stood in the darkened room, a quiet smile playing on his lips. He was thinking about modern technology and how he could use it.

It had been more than a hundred years since he had been in this city, and surely all memory of him had been forgotten. Using Jonathan, his faithful servant, as agent, he had purchased this house that suited his needs so well. It was centrally located, and the streets were crowded during the day.

The three windows in the back of the house had been quickly replaced, and since the house was attached, there were no side windows to worry about. The only problem was the front windows, and he was having that seen to right now.

The dark canvas draped over the house from top to bottom allowed him to begin his new lifestyle before all the work was complete. He had ordered special glass for his front windows—glass that would let none of the sun's harmful rays in—windows that no one could look into but that he could look out of.

All these years he had been forced to live on the dregs of humanity, the only ones alone at night: the drugged and diseased. Now he would pick and choose among the healthiest, the most vibrant. He would have Jonathan follow and observe. He would be the first—the only vampire to go window shopping.

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# Classified Continued

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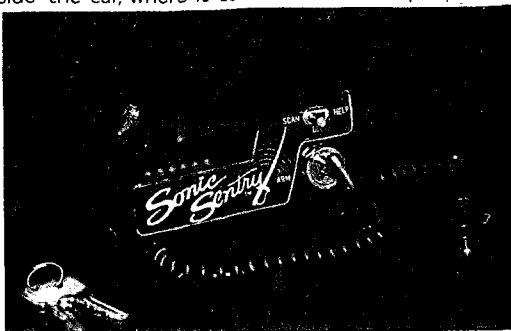
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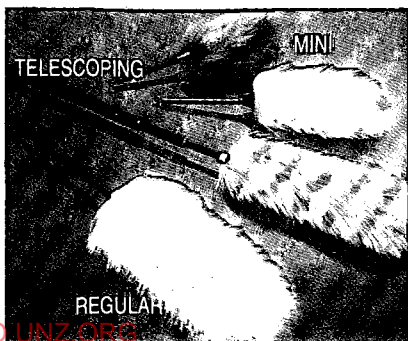
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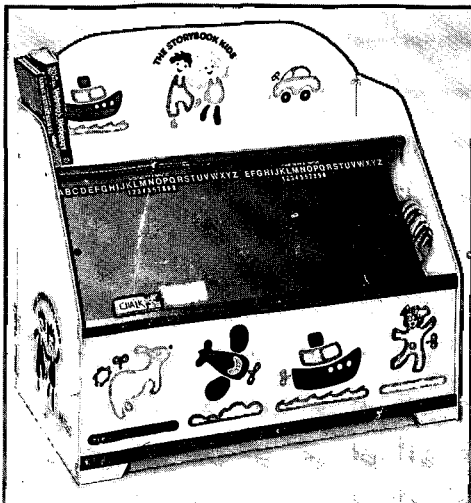


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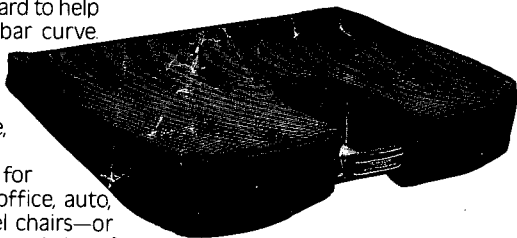
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If you hadn't seen this photograph, would you believe there could be a place to store a multitude of toys and games that also incorporates a bookshelf, plus serves as an art-and-play center — all in 18"x32" of floor space! 29" high, constructed of hard-board and wood with safe, smooth sanded edges and a non-toxic finish, the chest is decorated with storybook characters and has sliding chalkboard doors (chalk and eraser included). Illustrated instructions for assembly are provided; all parts predrilled and all screws included. A space-saver, a colorful accent for kids' rooms or family room, this is a creative inducement for children to keep their possessions in order. **\$32.98** (\$7.50) #A1877.



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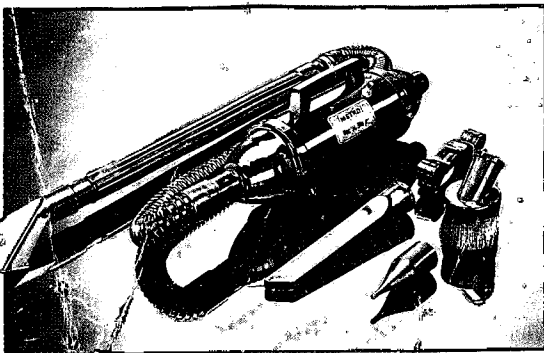
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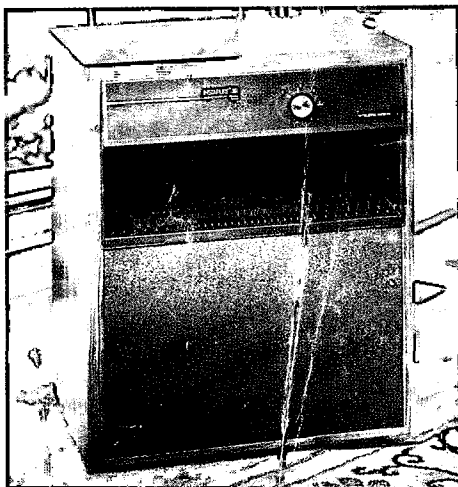
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